

THE USE OF פֶּסַח IN ISA 45:22:
A PARONOMASTIC TAUNT

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of אֵפֶס in Isa 45:22. Isaiah uses polysemy to depict YHWH's call to salvation that is directed to both the "ends of the earth" and the idol-like "nothings of the earth."

Throughout the entire book, and particularly chs. 40-55 of Isaiah, the prophet repeats the term אֵפֶס to describe idols and idolaters as "nothing" in comparison to the altogether incomparable YHWH. In Isa 45:22, however, אֵפֶס appears in the idiomatic phrase אֵפֶס אֶרֶץ (ends of the earth). All translations and commentators understand the expression as a geographic reference without allowing Isaiah's other uses of the term to influence this occurrence. This thesis argues that not only does Isaiah intend to call to salvation the "ends of the earth" but also the idol-like "nothings of the earth."

After reviewing some preliminary considerations, this work begins by examining the lexeme אֵפֶס and its cognates in extra-biblical and canonical contexts. Next, it considers the form and structure of Isaiah, especially that of 40-55. Then, it analyzes the literary-theological context of Isaiah. Finally, this thesis offers a fresh reading of Isa 45:22 in light of the previous analysis and concludes that אֵפֶס אֶרֶץ signifies both the "ends of the earth" and "nothings of the earth."

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David Sobey
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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Biblia Sacra</i>
<i>BHRG</i>	Van der Merwe, Christo, Jackie Naudé, and Jan Kroeze. <i>A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar</i> . London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999
BL	Bible and Literature
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago, 1956–
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>DCH</i>	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by D. J. A. Clines. 6 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–
<i>DNWSI</i>	Hoftijzer, J. and K. Jongeling. <i>Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions</i> . 2 vols. Handbuch der Orientalistik. Leiden: Brill, 1995
ESV	English Standard Version
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford, 1910
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, Ludwig and Walter Baumgartner. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-2000
HB	Hebrew Bible
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>IBHS</i>	Waltke, Bruce K. and M. O'Connor. <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns: 1990
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JDDS	Jian Dao Dissertation Series
J-M	Joüon, Paul and Takamitsu Muraoka. <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . 2 Vols. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NJPS	Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies

OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PO	Pretoria Oriental Series
RVA	Reina Valera Antigua
SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
Syr.	Syriac
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–
TO	Targum Onqelos
TJ	Targum Jonathan
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
Vg.	Vulgate
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WHS</i>	Williams, Ronald J. <i>Williams' Hebrew Syntax</i> . 3d ed. Rev. and Exp. by John C. Beckman. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebraistik</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

The Davidic monarchs and their subjects, living at the crossroads of empires in eighth-century BC Judah, vacillate between political allegiances and find their attendant survival uncertain. The rulers' alliances waver between the small but local Syro-Ephraimite coalition, the dominant Assyrian empire, and the up-and-coming Babylonians. Beyond mere politics, the Judahites and their neighbors understand the outcome of warfare to have cosmic provenience and implications. Desperate for assistance, Israel turns to other peoples and gods for deliverance. Into this uncertainty, the prophet Isaiah ben Amoz calls the kings and people of Judah to return to YHWH, obey his covenant, and trust in the genuine Sovereign for salvation from impending invasions. Through weal and woe, the prophet describes the incomparability of YHWH, who is the only source of hope and help.

Isaiah provokes his hearers to consider where they will seek their sustenance. In Isa 40-55, YHWH contends with and proves the ineptitude of false gods and their worshippers through a series of trial speeches. The verdict shows that Israel, as well as those who join the covenant community, secures deliverance through repentance and trust in YHWH, who is the exclusive source of strength. Through various contrasts and proclamations, Isaiah demonstrates that the idols are worthless—that they themselves need help and are without hope.

Altogether monotheistic, Isaiah declares that there is no god but YHWH. Compared to YHWH, all else is considered “nothing” (דָּבָר). The prophet describes how idols (41:22) and their worshippers—predominately foreign nations (40:17; cf. 41:12)—are of no benefit. For this reason, he repeats the refrain: “there is no other god but

YHWH, none” (אֵפֶס, 47:8; cf. 45:6, 14). The word אֵפֶס, found in Isaiah more than any other corpus, describes the idols and their worshippers as *nothing*. Particularly within his polemic against other gods, Isaiah contrasts the incomparable YHWH with the nothing-like idols and their followers, who resemble the objects of their worship and who will subsequently become inconsequential themselves.

One of the greatest biblical poets, Isaiah uses wordplay throughout his oracles. Not unlike other prophets, Isaiah names or refers to individuals or groups with specific terms or phrases for weal or woe. In this manner, the prophet creates a pun with the word אֵפֶס in Isa 45:22. By understanding Isaiah’s use of אֵפֶס within the context of YHWH’s dispute with the idols/idolaters, one discerns another instance of Isaianic paronomasia—YHWH calls to the אֵפֶסִים (“nothings”/ends) of the earth to turn and be saved.

After reviewing previous scholarly interpretations of Isaiah 45:22 and its greater context, this thesis will investigate the term אֵפֶס within the Hebrew Bible and other pertinent corpora. Next, this work will consider the form and structure of Isaiah, paying particular attention to YHWH’s trial speeches with the false gods and their worshippers. The verdict will resound: YHWH alone is Lord, any other god or power is as *nothing*. Subsequently, we will consider the literary-theological context and discern Isaiah’s numerous ways of describing the uniqueness of Israel’s God and the comparative nothingness of every other nation or god. With this background, the pertinent passage will be investigated in chapter five, followed by a conclusion demonstrating that the term אֵפֶס in Isa 45:22 has a dual reference to “nothings” or “ends” of the earth, whom YHWH summons to salvation.

2. PROLEGOMENA

This chapter will lay the foundation for the following analysis of Isa 45:22. We will first examine the issues of authorship, literary unity, and historical-cultural context and then review scholarly interpretations of Isa 45:22.

2.1 Authorship and Unity

Critical scholars generally deny Isaianic authorship of the entire canonical book and divide the book into three distinct units. The tripartite division of the book is a foregone conclusion for many; as Petersen claims, “[V]irtually no one maintains that the entire book (or even most of it) was written by one person.”¹ Two major factors lead many to discern disunity within the book: first, the respective sections of the book seem to presuppose a change of *Sitz im Leben*; that is, the book appears to address different stages in the history of Israel. The evidence proffered for this change is the conspicuously different tone and style many find in different portions of the book. It is claimed, secondly, that one goes “beyond enlightened logic” to assume that a single author could foretell events—especially the name of Cyrus as much as 150 years in advance (44:28, 45:1).² Several discern three discrete sections: 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66. These respective chapters address eighth-century Judah, mid-sixth-century exiles, and sixth- to fifth-century returnees. Nonetheless, there are several legitimate reasons for understanding the book as a unified composition from Isaiah in the eighth-century.

¹ David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 48. Petersen acknowledges the difficulty of the first chapter with certain portions that “appear related to later portions of the book” (ibid., 49).

² Christopher R. Seitz, “Isaiah, Book of (First Isaiah)” *ABD* 3:472-473. Scholars also offer several other arguments against a single author (e.g., there is a lack of explicit attribution to Isaiah after ch. 40); however, an extensive investigation into authorship is beyond the nature of the present work.

In spite of the scholarly “consensus,” reading Isaiah as a unified work from Isaiah ben Amoz leads to a better interpretation of the data as well as the book. The presupposition for many who deny Isaianic unity is an anti-supernatural bias that predetermines that Isaiah could not have predicted future events, let alone the name of an individual.³ Thus, if one allows for special revelation, predictive prophecy does not rule out a unified composition.⁴ Moreover, the naming of Cyrus is fundamental to Isaiah’s argument. If the author(s) presents false witness in court (see below), he undermines his case entirely and shows that he fabricates YHWH just as the idolaters form their images.

Additionally, closer scrutiny disproves much of the alleged discontinuity of style and historical context. Even in a cursory reading, one finds discontinuity between Isa 1-39 and 40-66; however, to bifurcate (or trifurcate) the book on this basis ignores the continuity apparent in a single hand. Many admit that there are key terms, themes, and even a coherent theology that run throughout the whole book (e.g., Zion/Jerusalem and YHWH as the Holy One and King).⁵ Petersen, for example, finds in Isa 1 “one of the most telling challenges to the scholarly consensus” since some ideas in ch. 1 “appear related to later portions of the book” and resemble “language that appears in chapters 40-55... or even 56-66.”⁶ Many also acknowledge the dependence of the later sections of the

³ Kitchen claims that there were several previous rulers in (what became) Persia who were named Cyrus before Cyrus the Great. Thus, the naming of one from the east named Cyrus is not completely outlandish (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 380). Regardless, YHWH foretold Cyrus’ name to demonstrate his supernatural power. The naming of Cyrus *should* confound skeptics (see below).

⁴ This is not the only biblical text where an individual is named before the fact (cf. 1 Kgs 13:2).

⁵ Klaus Baltzer. *Deutero-Isaiah* (Hermenia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1.

⁶ *The Prophetic Literature*, 49.

prophecy upon “First Isaiah.”⁷ Thus, the tripartite division has recently been acknowledged to be too simplistic. For this reason some propose a complex history of various sources, which a final redactor combined and sewed together almost seamlessly.⁸ However, one finds it difficult not to look with suspicion upon an argument that first assumes the conclusion and then seeks to explain the *absence* of evidence.

Several scholars have also simply presupposed or exaggerated the apparent disjointed historical context. Outside the handful of references to Babylon, Motyer argues, “there is little that is exclusively or typically Babylonian about the chapters [40-55] save that Cyrus is named as Babylon’s conqueror (44:25, 45:1).”⁹ To divide the book on the basis of supposed historical differences results in un-provable and subjective distinctions. On the basis of these unnatural divisions, for instance, Petersen claims the exodus was “unimportant” to Isaiah ben Amoz and ignores obvious allusions (Isa 12:2; cf. 40).¹⁰ More often than not, the disunity of Isaiah is claimed as an axiomatic truth; the evidence, however, is not as conclusive.

⁷ As Childs says, “both its older and newer elements have been structured into a clear theological pattern which is integrally connected with Second Isaiah...a major aim of the theological redaction of First Isaiah was to assure that its message was interpreted in the light of Second Isaiah” (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979], 331, 333). Elsewhere he says, “Certainly the force of much of the imagery of both Second and Third Isaiah is missed unless the connection with First Isaiah is recognized” (*ibid.*, 329-30).

⁸ E.g., Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature*, 48; cf. Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 15-20.

⁹ *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 28.

¹⁰ *The Prophetic Literature*, 37. Isaiah 12:2 contains a verbatim line from the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:2). Moreover, ch. 12 comes on the heels of an *exodus-like deliverance* (כַּאֲשֶׁר הִיטָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיוֹם עֲלֹתוֹ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, 11:16b).

2.2 Historical Milieu

Isaiah's scathing critiques of idols and idolatry appear superfluous in the post-exilic period when idolatry was not as abundant; on the other hand, Isaiah's polemics better address the eighth-century Judah milieu. Many presume Cyrus' reign to be the *terminus ad quo* for "Deutero-Isaiah" and that the book was predominantly composed in Babylon.¹¹ Some claim that "an exiled Jew" would be disenchanted by the exile and conclude that YHWH "was not better than the other gods."¹² However, one finds a significantly different emphasis within the religious community when reading the supposed contemporary religious leaders of the newly restored community. These presumed post-exilic contemporaries do not overtly address the problem of idolatry (cf. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).¹³ Archaeologists have discovered relatively few pagan shrines or statues dating to the Persian period to warrant Isaiah's lengthy and repeated polemics compared to the thousands of idols and idolatrous paraphernalia, dating between the tenth- and sixth-century in Palestine.¹⁴ Thus, the Palestinian setting fits just as well (if not better) in eighth-century Judah, a time when the author may accurately decry rampant "religious aberration."¹⁵ Therefore, the supposed date of "Deutero-Isaiah"

¹¹ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 23.

¹² Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres of Is. XL-LV* (VTSup 24; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 244.

¹³ Additionally, the restoration of the temple, while crucial in these post-exilic books, is hardly (if ever) mentioned in "Third-Isaiah" (Shultz "Isaiah, Isaiahhs, and Current Scholarship," 254).

¹⁴ Leith, Mary Joan Wynn, "Israel Among the Nations: The Persian Period" in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (Ed. M.D. Coogan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 276-316. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (LAI; Ed. Douglas A. Knight; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 348. Cf. Ephraim Stern, "Between Persia and Greece: Trade, Administration and Warfare in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods (539-63 BCE)" in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. Thomas E. Levy; New York: Continuum, 1995), 432-446.

¹⁵ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 26. Shultz also finds some of the characterizations to be "overly selective and one-sided" ("Isaiah, Isaiahhs, and Current Scholarship," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to*

is not as certain as it is claimed. As far as the location is concerned, Kitchen claims, “Second Isaiah betray[s] no first-hand knowledge of the metropolis in Babylon”¹⁶ and though he dates the book very late, Baltzer also sees Jerusalem as the place where “Deutero-Isaiah” was composed. He lists several reasons, including the author’s familiarity “with Jerusalem’s geographic position,” which the prophet “incorporates into his text.”¹⁷ Therefore, eighth-century Judah provides the best *Sitz im Leben* for Isaiah’s disputes with the idols. Rather than arguing a moot point, Isaiah addresses his contemporaries’ temptation to look to idols and other nations for assistance.

2.3 Historical-Cultural Context

Some scholars have critiqued Isaiah’s polemic against the idols as a misrepresentation of genuine image worship because many idolaters understood that the deity constitutes more than the physical image; the idol was the god’s abode or earthly representation.¹⁸ For example, in Egypt the gods consist of spiritual bodies and inhabit the images with their “souls,” because those same images resemble “the gods in form, visage, and color.”¹⁹

Faith?: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture [eds. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012], 254).

¹⁶ *On the Reliability*, 379. Childs admits the absence of a historical setting is “in striking contrast” to other prophetic books (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 325). By being loosed of its chronological mooring, as he sees it, Isaiah testifies “to a theology which was directed to subsequent generations of Israelites. Sinful Israel would always be the object of divine terror; repentant Israel would receive his promises of forgiveness” (ibid., 327). Yet, Isaiah communicates this theology by showing that YHWH invokes terror *in history*.

¹⁷ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 24. For his part, Baltzer dates “Deutero-Isaiah” to 450-400 BC (ibid., 30).

¹⁸ Edward M. Curtis, “Idol, Idolatry” *ABD* 3:377; Michael B. Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image” in *Born in Heaven Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Ed. Michael B. Dick; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 1-54; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 101. This thesis predominately focuses on Isaiah’s literary description of idols within his prophecy—not the historical-cultural setting. The brief comments that follow obviously overgeneralize this broad, significant topic

¹⁹ Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes*, 100.

Furthermore, critics argue that Isaiah does not describe the idols or their function according to this standard ancient Near Eastern conception, but instead the prophet claims that these images *are* the gods themselves, according to these skeptics.

Any idolater could potentially scoff at Isaiah's caricatures of the foolishness of idol manufacturing, yet no idol worshipper would turn a blind eye to the prophet's taunt that the images accomplish nothing (Isa 41:23). Isaiah does not intend to give an exhaustive discourse on the nature of idolatry. Instead, the prophet focuses on the most significant issue—other gods do not *do* anything. The gods' impotence is the basis for Isaiah's mockery of the construction of idols. For this reason, Isaiah commands *the gods represented by the idols* to do anything, good or bad, yet they remain completely motionless and silent. Therefore, Isaiah concludes that these idols are nothing because they do nothing—well deserving of scorn. The gods behind the images are no more powerful than the block of wood that represents them. Indeed, Isaiah will call *their* (i.e., the gods') statues (נִסְכִּים) an empty wind, because *they* accomplish nothing (אֶפֶס מַעֲשִׂיהֶם, 41:29). Isaiah's polemic would still have rhetorical effect on his hearers, regardless of the theological understanding of idol-worshippers. To require of Isaiah a comprehensive philosophical analysis of idolaters misses the point—no other god *does anything* but YHWH.²⁰

²⁰ Oswalt notes that idolatry is the “point that the fundamental difference between the biblical and the nonbiblical religions is clearest” because YHWH is transcendent, unlike the other gods who “are coterminous with this world” (*Isaiah 40-66*, 175-76).

2.3.1 Comparative Literary Form

Israel was not the only nation who claimed their God or king was unique. Consider New Kingdom Ramesses II's inscription about his own supremacy in the Kadesh battle:

*No officer was with me, no charioteer, No soldier of the army, no shield-bearer; My infantry, my chariotry yielded before them, Not one of them stood firm to fight with them... Too great is he, the great lord of Egypt... To allow aliens to step on his path! What are these Asiatics to you, O Amun, The wretches ignorant of god? I am alone, there's none with me! ...Hail, O good warrior, firm of heart, You have saved your soldiers, your chariotry; You are Amun's son who acts with his arms, You have felled Khatti by your valiant strength. You are the perfect fighter, there's none like you...*²¹

In this passage, the Egyptian monarch's exaltation of himself as entirely unique is not unlike the language Isaiah uses of YHWH. In his monograph on the incomparability of God, Labuschagne catalogs several similar ancient Near Eastern parallels that describe the uniqueness or exclusivity of certain gods and/or kings.²² Similar to some Israelites, one finds names and titles that extol the incomparability of individuals (e.g., Mannu-kī-šarri, 'who is like the king?').²³ However, the affirmation of the uniqueness of other gods or rulers is generally hollow. Since most other nations practice henotheism or monolatry, they overtly acknowledge the existence and rivalry between other gods. This thinking produces seemingly contradictory phrases such as, "he has no equal among the gods, his brothers," or, "Thou shinest, thou alone! None among the gods equals thee."²⁴ In these contexts, an appellation that denotes exclusivity "is not bestowed on one god at the expense of the other, for it is nothing more than an epithet expressing abounding praise to

²¹ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: Volume II: The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 65-66, emphasis added.

²² See, e.g., pp. 31-62 in *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (PO 5; Leiden: Brill, 1966).

²³ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43, 36.

both gods.”²⁵ However, Israel’s worship is unique, for the rest of biblical testimony and Isaiah in particular show that YHWH is not only special but the *only* Deity, as we will see below.

2.4 Review of Literature

Before investigating Isa 45:22 afresh, we will consider scholarly interpretations of this same passage. All scholarship consulted agrees that the phrase under analysis, אפסי ארץ in Isa 45:22, refers to a geographic reference in some manner. Most translate the phrase “ends of the earth”²⁶ and understand it as a group of individuals *located at* the “ends of the earth” or as a synecdoche for *all people of the earth*.²⁷ Commentators understand the identity of the people entailed in the “ends of the earth” as either the Israelites, who are spread abroad by the exile, or non-Israelites. Those authors who conceive of the “ends of the earth” as the nations understand the passage as either YHWH’s offer of salvation to these foreigners or universal recognition by those same nations of the vindication of Israel. Most equate the referents of the פליטי הגוים (the escaped of nations) in 45:20 as the same אפסי ארץ in Isa 45:22.

Most interpret Isaiah 45:22 as a call to all humankind to turn to YHWH. Delitzsch understands the escapees (פליטים) as “a remnant of the whole mass of the heathen” that are offered salvation.²⁸ Similarly, Motyer,²⁹ Lee,³⁰ Smith,³¹ and Oswalt understand the

²⁵ Ibid., 41.

²⁶ Watts alone translates אפס as “borderlands” in Isa 45:22 (*Isaiah 34-66* [WBC 25; rev. ed.; Columbia: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 2005], 704). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s.

²⁷ One could argue that this is a merism, i.e., one end of the earth to the other.

²⁸ *Isaiah* (vol. 7 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*; eds. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; trans. James Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 228.

²⁹ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 364-66.

³⁰ *Creation and Redemption in Isaiah 40-55* (JDDS 2; BL 2; ed. Philip P. Chia and Yeo Khiok-khng; Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1995), 91.

phrase to refer to “the idolatrous world.”³² Others connect the פליטי הגוים with the description of Cyrus’ conquest, which was described earlier in the chapter (45:1). Brueggemann³³ and Westerman see the refugees (פליטים) as those “who have escaped from a lost battle, from the downfall of a state” wrought by Cyrus.³⁴ Koole also reads the phrase פליטי הגוים as referring to “non-Israelites who were able to save their lives from destruction in Babylon and under the nations subject to Babylon.”³⁵ He claims the phrase אפסי ארץ is synonymous with קצה הארץ; i.e., the escapees who “are located in all corners of the earth.”³⁶ Nevertheless, those scholars who conceive of the אפסי ארץ as those who escape the Persian monarch’s sword still understand the call of 45:22 to be universal, since Isaiah also describes Cyrus’ conquest in universal terms.³⁷ Thus, all humankind is invited to enjoy YHWH’s salvation.³⁸ Therefore, some argue, Isa 45:22 is “the widest possible invitation to salvation”³⁹ and “the greatest and most openly evangelical invitation which the Old Testament anywhere contains.”⁴⁰

However, others do not take Isa 45:22 as a description of a universal offer of salvation but as the legal vindication of Israel. Whybray claims that understanding the

³¹ Smith, *Isaiah 40-66* (NAC 15B; Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2009), 277. He references 44:17.

³² Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 223.

³³ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 84.

³⁴ *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 174-5.

³⁵ *Isaiah III* (3 vols.; HCOT; ed. Cornelis Houtman et al.; Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1997), 2:482.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:486.

³⁷ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 84; Koole, *Isaiah III*, 2:485.

³⁸ Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 230. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, 174-5; McKenzie, *Second Isaiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Conclusion* (AB 20; Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), 84; Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 249-50.

³⁹ Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 355.

⁴⁰ Clements, “Isaiah 45:20-25” *Int* 40 (1986): 393.

passage as a universal offer of salvation “cannot be sustained” for it merely comes from an “ancient Christian tradition.”⁴¹ As he sees it, the call is cosmic, yet the passage refers to the world’s acknowledgement of Israel’s “triumphant vindication” by YHWH.⁴² Whybray, with the agreement of Merendino,⁴³ claims that the passage speaks of Israel’s legal acquittal, not “the soteriological connotations of Christian theology.”⁴⁴

Schoors concurs that the “ends of the earth” alludes to Israel, yet understands “salvation” to be deliverance or victory. He admits that the universal language is “the most obvious meaning of the text”; however, since he finds Isa 45:22 to be the only “Deutero-Isaianic” text to make such a universal offer of salvation, he concludes that the “ends of the earth” are the “totality of Israel with an allusion to the diaspora.”⁴⁵

Watts relies heavily on a post-exilic historical context and also finds a reference to Cyrus’ campaigns. The escapees are the residents of Babylon, “particularly those representing the lands of Syria-Palestine.”⁴⁶ These must “pay loyal tribute and thus be saved from [Cyrus’] military action.”⁴⁷ Watts alone understands *Cyrus* as the one who calls to the “borderlands” of the earth. The Persian king does not offer “salvation” but the “restoration of a measure of political order and prosperity, protection from vandals and bandits, and a share in the imperial peace in exchange for fealty and tribute.”⁴⁸

⁴¹ Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* (NCB; Ed. Ronald E. Clements; Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, Inc., 1975), 111.

⁴² Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 112.

⁴³ *Der Erse und der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung von Jes 40-48*. VTSup 31; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 448

⁴⁴ Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 112.

⁴⁵ *I am God Your Saviour*, 236. Remarkably, he is doggedly against such an interpretation. The reference to “every knee” and “tongue” also refers to Israel; yet “even if these be taken literally, they still do not involve universal salvation, but only universal recognition of Yahwe’s power” (ibid.).

⁴⁶ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 707.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 705.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 707.

One thing stands out among interpretations of אֲפֹס in Isa 45:22—no commentator reads this passage in light of Isaiah’s use of אֲפֹס within the book. The analysis below will demonstrate, as others have said, that Isaiah uses אֲפֹס as a synecdoche for all humanity *as well as* an appellation for the idol-like “nothings” of the earth. With the understanding that the author of Isaiah prophesied to eighth-century Judah about the contemporary issue of idolatry, we begin our analysis of Isa 45:22 with a lexical study of אֲפֹס.

3. LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF אִפֹּס

This chapter will investigate the semantic range of אִפֹּס by examining its cognates and etymology, as well as the use of the root in the Hebrew Bible, particularly Isaiah. At the conclusion of this chapter, we will find that the term אִפֹּס in Isa 45:22 may indeed be an example of paronomasia. Isaiah's predilection for the root is apparent by his abundant use of אִפֹּס, along with its several connotations; the most pertinent nuance is the more common "nothing," as well as the standardized phrase "the ends of the earth" (אִפְסֵי אֶרֶץ).

3.1 Semitic Cognates

Since אִפֹּס is relatively uncommon in Hebrew, an analysis of the Semitic cognates will yield a greater sampling of its usage and show that the root typically denotes the idea of *extinction* or *end*.⁴⁹ Though with infrequent attestation, one finds both Ugaritic and Phoenician inscriptions with the root. The former contains but one laconic, extant occurrence of the Ugaritic *'aps* with the idea of "end."⁵⁰ Within Phoenician, on the other hand, one finds *'ps* several times, often as a contrastive adverb or conjunction "however" or "but."⁵¹ Additionally, the root is used adjectivally in one inscription to describe a person: *'dm šm 'ps*. This expression may be translated as "a notable" or, significantly, "a nobody."⁵² This last example will prove useful in our analysis of Isa 45:22, since Isaiah will also attribute this term to an individual.

Of all the cognates of אִפֹּס, the Akkadian *apsû* occurs most frequently and may have a "genetic" relationship to the Hebrew phrase אִפְסֵי אֶרֶץ; additionally, the Akkadian

⁴⁹ אִפֹּס occurs 43 times as a noun and five times as a verb.

⁵⁰ "His feet did not reach the footstool (*hdm*)/ his head did not reach his end (*apsh*)" (KTU 1.6 I 59-61).

⁵¹ Charles R Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishing, 2000), 69.

⁵² J. Hofijzer and K. Jongeling, eds., "אִפֹּס," *DNWSI* 1:97.

pasāsu may share a common ancestor with אָפַס, since it similarly denotes extinction. Many understand *apsû* as a quintessential loanword from non-Semitic Sumerian AB.ZU, which means the “‘sentient’ sea.”⁵³ Akkadian subsequently borrowed this term and used it to denote the sea abode (*apsû*) of the Sumero-Akkadian god Ea. At times one finds *apsû* as a metonym for Ea, father of the patron deity Marduk of Babylon.⁵⁴ In a more general sense, *apsû* describes deep, subterranean water or the abyss below, which is contrasted with the height of mountains.⁵⁵ Thus, the Akkadian *apsû* refers to the aquatic (literal or metaphorical) abode or source of certain supernatural beings and/or the hidden netherworld. For our purposes, we note that the Akkadian *apsû* never carries the idea of non-existence or extinction like many of the occurrences of the Hebrew אָפַס. Instead, this Akkadian cognate refers to the great and distant abyss, not unlike the Hebrew phrase אָפַס אֶרֶץ, as we will see below. However, another Akkadian root (*pasāsu*) carries similar connotations with many of the “non-existence” nuances of אָפַס and may even be a cognate (see below). This root means “to break, cancel, annul, smash, obliterate,” or “become dilapidated.”⁵⁶ One also finds the nominal *pasūsātu* attributed to a person named “Destruction.”⁵⁷ Unlike the root *apsû*, *pasāsu* contains the verbal idea of

⁵³ From AB[A] (sea) and ZU (to know) (John Alan Halloran, *Sumerian Lexicon: A Dictionary Guide to the Ancient Sumerian Language* [Los Angeles: Logogram Publishing, 2006], 14). Coincidentally, this term is similar to the Greek ἀβυσσος (read the bilabial voiced aspirant as a bilabial voiceless aspirant), from which we have the English “abyss.” However, most understand the provenience of ἀβυσσος to be from the root βαθυς “deep” (Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* [Vol 1; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1960], 18). Interestingly, ἀβυσσος is also commonly associated with the sea (Chantraine, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque: Histoire des Mots* [rev. and exp. ed.; Paris: Klincksieck, 1999], 201).

⁵⁴ Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (SVT; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 72. One text reads *ša apsi anāku*, “I am of *apsû*”; i.e., of Ea (*CAD* 2:195-7).

⁵⁵ *CAD* 1:196.

⁵⁶ *CAD* 12:218-20.

⁵⁷ The line reads, “She (Lamaštu) seizes an old man they shall call her Destruction (*pasūsātu*)” (*CAD* 12:226). Cf. also the noun *pissatu* “cancelation” (*CAD* 12:426).

annulment and obliteration like the (often freestanding) Hebrew אַפֶּס. Both of these Akkadian terms will assist in the analysis of אַפֶּס.

The Aramaic root אַפֶּס carries connotations like the Hebrew אַפֶּס. Like its Hebrew cognate, the Aramaic noun אַפֶּס denotes “extremity,” whereas the verb may be translated “to be gone.” According to Jastrow, the verbal form of אַפֶּס derives from the root פֶּסַס or “cut off.”⁵⁸ Within the Targumim, one never finds the Aramaic אַפֶּס as a gloss for the Hebrew אַפֶּס.⁵⁹ Additionally, Syriac does not appear to have a cognate of אַפֶּס meaning “end.” The Peshitta usually translates אַפֶּס with other glosses.⁶⁰ While Aramaic provides little additional cognate material for our understanding of אַפֶּס, the Targumim usually demonstrate a different understanding of the Hebrew אַפֶּס than simply “extremity.” The Semitic cognates have shown that the root אַפֶּס signifies an end, cosmic extremity, or cessation.

3.2 אַפֶּס in the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew root אַפֶּס contains several of the nuances of these cognate languages. The term may function as an adverb to signify an exception, or more commonly as a noun to denote non-existence, “nothing,” or “the ends” of the earth. The exact etymology is difficult. Although many see the Akkadian *apsû* as the source for the Hebrew אַפֶּס,

⁵⁸ *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hedrickson, 2005), 106.

⁵⁹ When not using additional glossing, translators often used other words: שלים (to be finished), לחוד (except), אית (there is not), ברם ארי (however), סף (come to an end), למא (naught), גמירא “destruction,” כלא “like nothing,” and סיפי ארע (“ends of the earth”) for אפסי ארץ in every instance. The Aramaic סף commonly translates “end or extremity”; the verb סוף translates the Hebrew verb אפס (Cf. other Hebrew words קצה [e.g., Isa 5:26], ירכה [e.g., Isa 14:13], רחקי-ארץ [Isa 8:9]).

⁶⁰ E.g., חבו (perish); חבוא (destruction or ruin); אף גל אטמס (like nothing); חנם (empty); “vain,” or “useless;” לבג, “naught.” The phrase אפסי ארץ is translated חבוא גאחא “furthest ends of the earth” in Isaiah 45:22 and 52:10, while the (seemingly) synonymous Hebrew expression קצה הארץ is never translated as חבוא גאחא, but instead חבוא גאחא (ends of the earth; see below).

Lipiński claims the origin is the proto-Semitic *pss* (“to annul, come to an end”).⁶¹

Although the exact relationship of these presumed lexical relatives is challenging, one quickly surmises that the word אַפֶּס in biblical Hebrew signifies limitative clauses, describes a state of nonexistence, and refers to the limits of the world (or cosmos?) in the phrase אַפֶּסֶי אֶרֶץ.⁶² In other words, the expression אַפֶּסֶי אֶרֶץ appears to be unique among the other nuances of אַפֶּס as we will soon see. Before examining אַפֶּס in Isaiah, we will investigate the use of the term in its verbal, nominal, and phrasal forms through the rest of the Hebrew Bible; subsequently, we will consider Isaiah’s usage.

3.2.1 The Verb אַפֶּס

The infrequent (5x) verbal form of אַפֶּס describes the cessation of the subject. The verb אַפֶּס means “to be at an end,” or “to be no more” and is always vocalized as a *Qal*

⁶¹ Cf. Jastrow above.

⁶² Perhaps Hamp may be correct in claiming that it “is not possible” to discern the etymology (“אַפֶּס,” *TDOT* 1:361). There is little disagreement that the phrase אַפֶּסֶי אֶרֶץ may have some connection with the Akkadian *apsû*. Yet Pope, like others, claims the Hebrew phrase אַפֶּסֶי אֶרֶץ comes from “the notion that the *apsû* was located in the far distance. The meaning of ‘non-existence’ would naturally develop from the idea of extremity, end” (*El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 72). This ‘natural’ development is not apparent to all. Lipiński legitimately notes that “it is not easy to establish a semantic link between the Sumero-Akkadian a b z u > *apsû* and the use of ‘ps outside of the expression ‘apsê-’eres” (“Il n’est pas facile d’établir un lien sémantique entre l’emploi suméro-akkadien de a b z u > *apsû* et l’usage du terme ‘ps en dehors de l’expression ‘apsê-’eres” [“Emprunts suméro-akkadiens en hébreu biblique” *ZAH* 1(1988):63]). Instead he offers the proto-Semitic root *pss* which, if transcribed correctly, is found only in Ps 12:2. With such scant evidence it is difficult to arrive at a satisfying conclusion. As we will see below, regardless of its provenience, the noun and verb אַפֶּס do not necessarily contain the idea of a physical “end” but instead nonexistence or metaphorical “end,” while the phrase אַפֶּסֶי אֶרֶץ always refers to “the great beyond.” Thus, while speculative, this word may have merged in some fashion from the two roots: *pss*, “to be terminated” and *apsû* “the extremities of the earth.” There does seem to be some semantic overlap (cf. אַפֶּסֶי below) and the Ugaritic occurrence of *aps* seems to indicate a physical end.

Philippe Reymond believes the phrase speaks of the water that “surrounds the entire earth and spreads infinitely” (“Encerclant toute la terre, ses eaux s’étalent jusqu’à l’infini” [*L’eau, sa vie, et sa signification dans l’Ancien Testament*] (VTSupp. 6, Leiden: Brill, 1958), 170-1]).

stative.⁶³ For example, אַפֶּס twice describes the Egyptians who have *run out* of money (אַפֶּס כֶּסֶף, Gen 47:15-16). The author links אַפֶּס with the synonymous תָּמַם.⁶⁴ The Psalmist uses אַפֶּס to ask whether YHWH's faithfulness has ceased (הָאֶפֶס) or if the Lord's word has come to an end (גָּמַר, Ps 77:9 [77:8 Eng.]). In this instance the term is also parallel to גָּמַר "to come to an end." Below, we will consider two more instances of words paired with the verbal form of אַפֶּס in Isaiah (תָּמַם [2x], כָּלָה, Isa 16:4, 29:20). Thus far, we have seen that the verb אַפֶּס describes the termination of a subject or its lack of existence.

3.2.2 The Noun אַפֶּס

We will now look at the more frequent (43x) nominal form of אַפֶּס.⁶⁵ This lexeme describes an "extremity" of an object *only* when in the phrase אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ; in addition to a few idiomatic phases, it commonly denotes nonexistence—that which is beyond the end (i.e., nothingness). When denoting "nothing," אַפֶּס is often used adverbially.

Frequently the noun אַפֶּס overlaps semantically with the adverb אֵין/אֵין.⁶⁶ In 2 Samuel 9:3, one reads of David's desire to find one of Saul's descendants. David first asks, "Is there anyone left of Saul's house?" (הֲכִי יֵשׁ עוֹד אִשְׁרֵי נֹתֵר לְבֵית שָׁאוּל, 9:1). After

⁶³ HALOT, 79. This is also found in 1QHa Col. xxi:10. According to Walke and O'Conner, this stative is used to describe a "circumstance or an accident" (§IBHS 22.4d).

⁶⁴ Genesis 47:15 begins וַיָּתֵם הַכֶּסֶף מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ... לֵאמֹר... אַפֶּס כֶּסֶף ("Then the money ran out from the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan so they came... saying... 'There is no more money'").

⁶⁵ This number reflects all of the occurrences according to the MT. Conjecture emendations were not tallied (see below). The noun אַפֶּס "ankle" is usually listed separately in Lexica because of its different vocalization and meaning (Ezek 47:3). It is not difficult to see the connection between this *hapax* and the sense of the root אַפֶּס since the ankles (or "soles" in Targum Jonathan and the Peshitta) as the extremities (אַפְסֵי) of one's body.

⁶⁶ J-M compare אַפֶּס to אֵין and claim the former usually carries "the added nuance of *still more*" (J-M §160n). However, this is difficult to surmise from these contexts. The author does not claim that the two roots overlap entirely semantically, merely that אֵין provides an adequate synonym that demonstrates the nuances of אַפֶּס.

finding Saul's servant Ziba, the king questions, "*Is there not* anyone left of Saul's house" (9:3; cf. *האין עוד* in Jer 49:7). Similarly, Deut 32:36 uses the noun *אפס* as a particle of non-existence. For example, one generally translates *אפס עצור* "and there is none remaining, bond or free" (ESV). With a preposition, *אפס* seems to imply "without" or "lack." Consider also Job 7:6:

ימי קלו מני-ארג	my days are more swift than a weaver's bobbin
ויכלו באפס תקוה	they expire <i>without</i> hope (cf. Prov 14:28, 26:20; Dan 8:25).

Like *אין*, *אפס* functions as a negative answer to a yes-no question: *העוד עמך ואמר אפס* "Is anyone with you? And one replies 'No'" (Amos 6:10, cf. Judg. 4:20 *היש-פה איש ואמרת אין*, "Is anyone here? You shall say, 'No'"). In these instances, the noun *אפס* signifies a lack of existence or that someone or something has metaphorically "come to an end."

3.2.3 Expressions with *אפס*

Three idiomatic phrases contain *אפס* and express an idea usually distinct from the freestanding noun. We will examine the following: *אפס כי*, *אפס עוד*, and *אפסי ארץ*.

3.2.3.1 *אפס כי*

The phrase *אפס כי* occurs five times⁶⁷ as a limitative construction used "to introduce an exception after a positive statement."⁶⁸ Similar to the Phoenician *aps* we considered above,⁶⁹ the Hebrew *אפס* may be translated "however," "yet," "except," or "nevertheless." The construction *אפס כי* limits or excludes the "implications arising from the content of an expression preceding it" or "something or someone in the (usually

⁶⁷ Num 13:28, Deut 15:4, Judg 4:9, 2 Sam 12:14, Amos 9:8. Some see the textually difficult 1 Sam 1:5 as another example based on the Gr (LXX^B) *πλην ουτι* that usually translates *אפס כי* (*HALOT*; Hamp "אפס," 361), yet this reading is not unanimous (cf. e.g., P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel* [AB 8; Garden City, NY, 1980], 52).

⁶⁸ J-M §173a.

⁶⁹ Hofstijzer and Jongeling, "אפס," 1:97.

preceding) context.”⁷⁰ For example, *יהיה־בך אביון כי־ברוך יברכך יהוה* (However, there will be no poor among you, for YHWH will surely bless you; Deut 15:4). Two instances of *אפס* also have this nuance even though they do not contain *כי* (Num 22:35 and 23:13).⁷¹

3.2.3.2 *אפס* עוד

Although less common, the phrase *אפס/אפסי עוד* expresses the idea of exclusivity, “to be singular” or “there is no other.” GKC understand it to have a *non nisi*, “only,” sense.⁷²

The idiom comes from the mouth of one possessing self-confidence and trust: *זאת העיר* (“Is this the exultant city, the one stationed securely, the one saying in her heart, ‘I am and there is no other’”; Zeph 2:15= Isa 47:8⁷³; Isa 47:10).

3.2.3.3 *אפסי* ארץ

By far the most common phrase that contains the root *אפס*, as well as the one found in the passage under consideration (Isa 45:22), is *אפסי* ארץ or “the ends of the earth.” As we have seen, there does not seem to be substantial overlap between the Hebrew *אפס* and its presumed Akkadian ancestor *apsû*, nor have there been any aquatic implications; yet *אפסי* ארץ may provide the closest parallel.

⁷⁰ BHRG §41.4.4.1.a; emphasis original.

⁷¹ The angel of YHWH commands Balaam *אתו תדבר אליך אשר־אדבר* Balaam later tells Balaq that he cannot speak anything (מאומה), only what God places in his mouth (Num 22:38). This nuance is also found at Qumran *מצעדי מצעדי* *אפס כי (לא ידעו כי מאתך מצעדי מצעדי)* “Yet they did not know that my steps are from you” (1QH^a Col. x:33).

⁷² GKC §152.s. In these instances Gesenius claims *אפס* contains a paragogic י (e.g., Isa 47:8). J-M, however, claim that it is the pronominal suffix “Me and *my exclusivity* still (is)” that is to say “Me, and me exclusively (=only me), I exist!” (Joüon §160n). The author follows the latter understanding.

⁷³ Zephaniah places this taunt on the lips of Assyria, while Isaiah does so to Babylon.

The exact phrase אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ occurs 14 times in the MT (2x in Isaiah).⁷⁴ One finds the expression used independently (Deut 33:17, 1 Sam 2:10, Ps 2:8), with the adjective כָּל to describe universality (כָּל אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ; Isa 45:22, 52:10; Ps 22:28, 67:8; 98:3; Prov 30:4), and with prepositions relating to extent (עַד, Zech 9:10, Ps 72:8;⁷⁵ לְ, Ps 59:14) and source (מִן, Jer 16:19).

This idiom may be the closest parallel to the Akkadian *apsû* referenced above. Two times the expression contains an aquatic context. Psalm 72:8 and Zechariah 9:10 (cf. *Sirach* 44:22 [MS B]) all share the bi-colon מִיַּם עַד־יָם וּמִנְהַר עַד־אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ (“from *sea* to *sea*, from *the river* until **the ends of the earth**”). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the cosmology from which this expression derives, many understand אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ to be a reference to the waters that surround the earth.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, water and cosmological conceptions seem to be secondary in the majority of the references to אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ. In addition, the term usually functions as a synecdoche, meaning “everyone,” without any reference to water. Thus far, we have found five major conceptions that

⁷⁴ If the *yod* in the phrase אַפְסֵי עוֹד is indeed paragogic one may claim that the *yod* in אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ is also paragogic. Perhaps the Masorites assumed it marked the construct plural and pointed it as such. The *yod* in the former phrase could have been understood as the pronominal suffix (so also J-M) and would not have been “corrected.” If this were the case the phrase could speak of “the ‘*apsû*’ (i.e., water deep) of the earth.” However the Masorites are consistent in understanding אַפְסֵי to be a masculine plural construct; additionally, when the term is the grammatical subject, the verb is inflected as plural.

⁷⁵ One may take this form in Mic 5:3 in a temporal sense. In light of the preceding context, the מוֹשֵׁל comes מִקֶּדֶם מִיַּם עוֹלָם (5.1). YHWH gives them up ... עַד־עֵת (5:2). However, the following context speaks of the remnant בְּגוֹיִם בִּקְרֵב עַמִּים (5:7).

⁷⁶ Raymond, *L'eau, sa vie*, 170-1. The identification of the river (נָהָר) is intriguing. Many times the definite נָהָר denotes the Euphrates; however, it is difficult to conceive how a *universal* reign would begin at the Euphrates—regardless of ancient cosmology. While speculative, it is possible this expression is closer to the Akkadian concept of *apsû* in the sense of “the deep.” If this were an archaic genitive ending י, instead of the masculine plural construct, one may understand these three texts as “he shall rule from sea to sea and from the River until the depth of earth.” This reign would describe the breadth, sea to sea, and depth, waters above to the waters below, of the reign. While extremely laconic, 5Q16 Frag. 1:3 may mention the אַפְסֵי of Sheol (שְׁאוֹל וּבְאֶפְסֵי).

derive from the root אפס: 1) the verbal idea of cessation, 2) the noun or adverb describing non-existence, 3) the limitative (אפס כי) and 4) exclusive (אפס עוד) constructions, and 5) the phrase “ends of the earth” (אפסי ארץ). We will now consider how Isaiah uses four of these conceptions.

3.2.4 אפס in Isaiah⁷⁷

Isaiah employs the word אפס more than any other biblical author. The root is found predominately in Isa 40-55 (12x out of 16x) to highlight the exclusivity of YHWH and the relative worthlessness of false gods.

We have seen above that Isaiah relates the verbal form of אפס twice with the concept of cessation. In Isa 16:4, the prophet places אפס in a quatrain synonymously parallel to כלה and תמם:

אפס <חמוץ> ⁷⁸	the oppressor is no more
כלה שד	The devastator has <i>come to an end</i>
תם <רמס> ⁷⁹	The one treading is <i>done away</i>
מנה ארץ	from the earth

Moreover, Isa 29:20 also places the verb כרת in a colon parallel to אפס. Thus, one sees in these passages the ideas of “coming to an end” or “being no more,” not unlike the Akkadian *pasāsu* “to obliterate, annul,” or “cancel” seen above.⁸⁰

Although Isaiah usually uses the nominal form of אפס to focus on YHWH’s exclusivity, he also places the form in other contexts. For example, the nominal is used adverbially to denote blamelessness “*without cause*” (Isa 52:4). Once again, this mirrors

⁷⁷ See Appendix A-B for Isaiah’s use of אפס relative to the rest of the Hebrew canon.

⁷⁸ Read חמוץ following 1QIs^a. The MT contains the anomalous חמץ.

⁷⁹ The MT contains a plural form of the verb תמו. This is opposed by virtually every witness (1QIs^a, LXX, Syr., Vg.).

⁸⁰ CAD 12:218-20.

another expression with אֵין (Isa 57:1) and simply negates a conditional clause in 54:15 as well.⁸¹

The noun אַפֶּס contrasts YHWH's particularity and greatness with that of the idols and their worshippers. As we have seen above, the prophet ironically describes the self-professed exclusivity of haughty Babylon with the phrase אֲנִי אַפְסִי עוֹד (Isa 47:8, 10). The wicked nation's declarations stand in stark contrast to the particularity of YHWH. For instance, Isaiah 45:14 has the *exact opposite* confession arising from the mouths of nations who acknowledge Israel's one God. Foreigners announce that God is amongst the Israelites (אֵל בְּךָ אֵל), and that there is no other (וְאֵין עוֹד)—no god (אַפֶּס אֱלֹהִים). In these two instances (Isa 47:8, 10), Isaiah uses אַפֶּס to describe Babylon's self-proclaimed exclusivity, which serves only as a parody of the unique YHWH, as the nations acknowledge.

The phrase אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ describes universality in Isaiah twice (45:22 and 52:10). In 52:10, YHWH's cosmic reign receives universal acknowledgment—every nation (כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם) and all far off (כָּל־אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ) behold YHWH's salvation-working arm. Within this passage the אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ are distinct from the people of Israel (see further below). Isaiah 45:22 is another instance of the phrase אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ, wherein YHWH calls “the ends of the earth” to be saved. Both Isa 45:22 and 52:10 carry the geographic sense of אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ. However, אַפֶּס is used repeatedly in and around Isa 45 to describe idols and their worshippers as “nothing,” unlike Isa 52:10. Before we move on to the analysis of form and structure, we must compare אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ with a synonymous expression.

⁸¹ The verse reads: הֲיִגֹר יִגֹּר אַפֶּס מֵאוֹתִי: “If someone should indeed contend, [he is] not from me.” Alternatively, one may understand the passage as follows, “Should someone indeed contend, nothing [of his contention will be] from me.”

אפסי ארץ vs. קצה הארץ 3.2.5

One synonym of אפס that deserves particular attention is קצה. This term has significant semantic overlap with אפס, particularly in the phrase “ends of the earth.” To be sure, early translators glossed the two expressions (קצה הארץ and אפסי ארץ) identically on numerous occasions.⁸² If, as this thesis argues, the use of אפס in Isaiah 45:22 is an instance of paronomasia,⁸³ it is significant how this more frequent, synonymous term relates to the idiom אפסי ארץ in Isaiah.

At first glance, the phrase אפסי ארץ is almost indistinguishable from קצה הארץ, yet one may discern a slight difference. The term קצה usually denotes an “edge” or “end” and is found 10 times in the phrase קצה הארץ in Isaiah. Although the distinction between אפס and קצה may be slight, קצה may denote an “end” while אפס the “very end” where the object actually ceases. Two comparisons will make this plain. Consider the following:

Table 3.1 אפס and קצה Minimal Pair #1

Isaiah 5:8	הוי מגיעי בית בבית שדה בשדה יקריבו עד אפס מקום והושבתם לבדכם בקרב הארץ Woe to those who join house to house, add field to field, until <i>there is no room</i> and you are made to dwell <i>alone</i> in the midst of the land
Josh 3:8b	כבאכם עד־קצה מי הירדן בירדן תעמדו And when you come to the <i>edge of the waters</i> of the Jordan you shall stand <i>in the Jordan</i>

One discerns two different ideas in these passages: אפס describes a nonexistent location, while קצה depicts the limit or edge of a substance. In this example, even at the קצה of the Jordan the waters *are still present*—one may stand in the water. On the other hand, אפס

⁸² See Appendices G-H.

⁸³ According to Greenstein, this is technically “polysemy” and not paronomasia “in which slightly dissimilar sounds or words are entailed” (“Wordplay, Hebrew,” *ABD* 6:970). However, Greenstein admits that such “hard and fast” distinction may work either way.

denotes an absence of a material—no one else may dwell with those swallowing up the land, for there is no space.⁸⁴

One may also distinguish **אפס** and **קצה** by noting how they function. The phrase **קצה הארץ** describes a *physical* end whereas **אפסי ארץ** may often be personified and function as a synecdoche for all humanity, as the following minimal pair seems to indicate:

Table 3.2 **אפס** and **קצה** Minimal Pair #2

Isa 49:6b	ונתתיך לאור גוים להיות ישועתי עד- קצה הארץ I set you as a light to the nations that my salvation might reach the <i>end of the earth</i>
Isa 52:10	חשף יהוה את-זרוע קדשו לעיני כל-הגוים וראו כל- אפסי-ארץ את ישועת אלהינו YHWH has bared his holy arms in the sight of all the nations. And all the <i>ends of the earth</i> shall see the salvation of our God.

Both phrases depict the universal reign of YHWH. However, the root **קצה** is never attributed to an individual and seems to describe a location, as opposed to a group of individuals. Thus, YHWH's salvation will fill the geographic earth.⁸⁵ Therefore, **אפסי ארץ** may uniquely be used for the personification and wordplay found in Isa 45:22.

3.3 Summary

By way of summary, we have examined the word **אפס** in various contexts. We have concluded that the etymology of **אפס** is uncertain, deriving from the Semitic root *pss*, the Akkadian *apsû*, or a complicated mix of the two. The Semitic root *ps* describes an “end” or cessation, although in Hebrew the word root commonly signifies “nothing” or “without” except in the phrase **אפסי ארץ**. We considered the use of **אפס** in the Hebrew

⁸⁴ Incidentally, Modern Hebrew seems to make this same distinction. **אפס** denotes “nothingness” or “zero” while **קצה** is the “end” or “edge.”

⁸⁵ Cf. also Isa 42:10, YHWH's praise arises from the end of the earth (**מקצה הארץ**) from those who descend to the sea (**ים**) all that fills it (**מלאו**), the coastlands (**איים**), and their inhabitants (**וישביהם**). Thus the language describes universal geographic adoration of YHWH.

Bible and Isaiah in particular and found that the verb describes the cessation of the subject, whereas the noun signifies “extremity” or “nothing,” and is employed as well as in a few idiomatic expressions. The phrase אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ appears to be unique among the other uses of אֶפֶס and describes the outer reaches of the earth. The prophet Isaiah’s proclivity for the term is most apparent within his polemic against idols and idolaters in 40-55. We now turn to consider the form and structure with which Isaiah communicates these polemics.

4. FORM AND STRUCTURE

This chapter will consider the form and structure of Isaiah 45:22 in the context of 44:24-46:13. Isaiah utilizes two discrete, major forms of literature in Isa 40-55: 1) the polemic genre, subdivided into trial speeches and disputations, and 2) oracles of salvation. After analyzing these literary forms, we will conclude that Isaiah 45:22 is an “oracle of salvation.” The prophet precedes this oracle with a “dispute” form (45:20-21) wherein YHWH contends with the idols and their worshippers to demonstrate that they are “nothing.” We will consider how Isaiah structures his prophecy similarly by alternating the two forms (polemic genre and oracles of salvation) in order to emphasize the contrast of weal and woe. At the conclusion of YHWH’s trial speeches with idolaters and their gods, Isaiah pronounces that false gods and those who worship them are both “nothing” and that idolaters may only find hope in the exclusive Creator.

4.1 Form

First, we shall note the two general forms, “polemic genre” and “salvation oracle.”

Within the former, YHWH takes an individual or group (idols, idolaters, or Israel) to court, declares that they are comparatively “nothing,” and announces that only YHWH is Lord. Then, by means of salvation oracles, YHWH displays his preeminence and beckons his vanquished adversary, Israel and/or the nations, to recognize the exclusivity of Israel’s God and to find confidence and assistance in him.

4.1.1 Polemic Genre

The first major form of literature is the “polemic genre.”⁸⁶ This form contains argumentative speech most commonly used to argue that YHWH alone is God. One may sub-classify this genre into “trial speeches” or “disputations.”

The prophet uses the first subclass of the polemic genre, “trial speech,” to castigate idols in Isaiah 40-55. The more general type of legal argument, *rib*, consists of a legal dispute initiated by a Suzerain whose covenant has been violated. This form appears elsewhere (e.g., Isa 1).⁸⁷ The “trial speech,” however, functions distinctly as a “defence of Yahwe’s claims” with a “conclusion that the claims of the adversary are false.”⁸⁸ The theological intent, therefore, is “to establish Yahwe’s sovereign greatness against the nothingness of the pagan gods.”⁸⁹ Isaiah introduces these trial speeches through various methods including rhetorical questions (מי, e.g., 40:12), summons (נקרבה, e.g., 41:1), and accusation (הן אתה, 41:24). The interjection הן occasionally introduces the legal conclusion in Isaiah (e.g., הן יבשו ויכלמו כל הנחרים בד, 41:11; cf. Isa 32:1; 33:7; 41:24, 29; 42:1; 44:11; 50:9, 11; 54:15; 55:4-5; 59:1) as well as an answer to rhetorical questions

⁸⁶ Little agreement exists about specific literary sub-genres. Most recognize a clear polemic that is leveled against false gods, the nations who worship them, and/or Israel (Eugene H. Merrill, “The Literary Character of Isaiah 40-55, Part 1: Survey of a Century of Studies on Isaiah 40-55” *BibSac* 144 [1987]: 34). The author’s classifications are largely dependent on Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour*. There are several other works on prophetic forms (e.g., Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* [trans., Hugh Clayton White; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991], cf. Robert H. O’Connell, *Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah* [JSSOT 188; ed. David J.A. Clines, et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994], 29-33).

⁸⁷ For a brief survey and extensive bibliography of the literature on the *rib* form see O’Connell, *Concentricity and Continuity*, 32. O’Connell rightly understands that Isaiah’s “main rhetorical concern seems to lie within the sphere of the divine-human covenant” (*ibid.*).

⁸⁸ Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour*, 239.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

(Isa 40:15 [2x]; 50:1, 2; cf. 49:21; 58:3, 4). In these two sub-forms, Isaiah describes YHWH's dispute with his adversaries.

These legal proceedings contain two to three characters. YHWH both presides and prosecutes in the legal decision, whereas the court defendants are either the nations (e.g., 40:13-17; 41:11-12, 28), their gods (e.g., 41:29; 44:9-17), or Israel (e.g., 43:8). Isaiah argues that YHWH did not appoint Israel to be in the dock but his witness (עֵד, 43:10, 12; 44:8); yet because of the nation's sin, YHWH condemns her (59:2). Therefore, YHWH foreordains and foretells of Cyrus in order to demonstrate God's power over creation and the course of humankind so that Israel might know that YHWH alone is God (45:1-5; 48:5-8; cf. Exod 9:16). YHWH calls Israel to play the role of his witness within the proceedings that they might attest to his exclusivity and vindicate their worship of him, thereby condemning the idols along with the idolaters.

Isaiah 45:20-21 follows this "trial speech" form. First, YHWH calls the פְּלִיטִי (to gather together and draw near for judgment (הַקְּבִצוּ וּבֹאוּ הַתִּנְגְּשׁוּ יַחְדָּו)). Then he berates his opponents with questions: "Who has made this heard long ago? Who declared it?" (45:21b). The prophet concludes this small trial with the declaration: "Was it not I, YHWH? And there is no other god" (45:21c).

The second subtype of the polemic genre is "disputation," which serves to emphasize either YHWH's nature as Creator, his sovereignty over the cosmos, or a combination of the two.⁹⁰ Isaiah utilizes this form to show that YHWH "is able to help his people... and that he does so in a manner which pleases him."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ibid., 294.

⁹¹ Ibid.

By means of these two polemic forms, Isaiah puts the gods on trial, proves them deficient, and proclaims that YHWH alone can deliver from present and future distress. All other gods and nations are judged to be helpless and hopeless—utter nothingness. Both polemic genres function, Scheuer says, “as literary devices for announcing salvation and for giving hope to Israel, [and] also as devices for warning the Israelites against appropriating for themselves the cultic practices of the nations.”⁹² Isaiah 45:20-21 follows the trial speech form and builds up to the salvation oracle found in 45:22-25.

4.1.2 Salvation Oracle

Isaiah uses the second major literary form, “salvation oracles,” not to condemn but exult in YHWH’s salvation. The passages that contain this form are marked by an assurance of salvation and are typically organized in a specific pattern. Schoors finds in the oracles of salvation a threefold framework (e.g., Isa 41:8-13):

- A. the assurance of Yahwe’s intervention;
- B. the clauses, which express the consequence of the divine intervention and deal with the reversal of the situation of distress;
- C. the final aims of Yahwe’s intervention.⁹³

Isaiah intersperses these paeans of YHWH’s deliverance with the trial speeches (see below).

Isaiah 45:22-25 should be classified as a salvation oracle. Although Schoors labels 45:20-25 as a trial speech, he recognizes that the form is “not pure” since, according to his taxonomy, oracles of salvation only address masculine singular referents;

⁹² *The Return of YHWH: The Tension between Deliverance and Repentance in Isaiah 40-55* (BZAW; New York, 2008), 101.

⁹³ This arrangement has been copied verbatim from Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour*, 40.

for this reason, he does not classify 45:22-25 as an oracle of salvation.⁹⁴ While the passage does not contain the proper order, it nonetheless contains each element:

B. Reversal	פנו־אלי והושעו	Turn to me and be saved
	כל־אפס־אֶרֶץ	all you nothings/ends ⁹⁵ of the earth
A. Assurance of YHWH's intervention	כי אני־אל ואין עוד	For I am God and there is no other
	בי נשבעתי	I have sworn by myself
	יצא מפי צדקה	justification has gone out from my mouth
	דבר ולא ישוב	a word that shall not return.
C. Final aim	כי־לי תכרע כל־ברך	For to me every knee shall bow
	תשבע כל־לשון	every tongue swear
	אך ביהוה לי אמר	Only in YHWH is it said of me
	צדקות ועז	are righteousness and strength
	עדיו יבוא ויבשו	to him shall they come and be
	כל הנחרים בו:	ashamed
	ביהוה יצדקו ויתהללו	those who were incensed at him
	כל־זרע ישראל:	In YHWH are they justified and glorified
		all the seed of Jacob

Although unique, Isa 45:22-25 may be classified as a salvation oracle.⁹⁶ Thus, the passage under investigation is an oracle of salvation immediately following a trial speech (45:20-21). Within Isa 40-55, the prophet intermittently juxtaposes the two major forms, polemics and words of consolation. These passages blend together to evince and glory in the incomparability of YHWH. Next, we consider how Isaiah structures his prophecy to highlight this contrast.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 237.

⁹⁵ See below.

⁹⁶ Baltzer also struggles with the classification and concludes it is part of a “throne scene” (*Deutero-Isaiah*, 248). O’Connell understands the greater context (45:14-46:2) as “a threat against foreign idols and nations that functions as a consolation of Israel/Jacob since it promises them vindication (*Concentricity and Continuity*, 187).

4.2 Structure of Isaiah

Isaiah lays out his prophecy in the general structure of woe to weal to garner trust and faith in YHWH and in order to provoke Judah to return to her God, who alone provides help and hope.⁹⁷ The entire prophecy communicates YHWH's purposes for the disobedient eighth-century Judah. After Israel's God punishes his people for their disobedience, he promises to restore them for his glory. The book of Isaiah may be generally outlined as follows:

1-39 A Disobedient People

1-12 *Who is king?* YHWH and his appointed vice-regent.

13-23 *Who is Lord of every nation?* YHWH, therefore all nations are accountable.

24-27 *Who is judge?* YHWH and he will bring all to right.

28-39 *What is he doing with his people?* He disciplines them for their covenant disobedience.

40-66 A People Restored

40-55 *Who can restore?* YHWH alone can restore for his glory.

56-66 *What will his kingdom look like?* YHWH's kingdom will be characterized by universal righteousness and justice.

The highest concentration of the two polemic genres, as well as the salvation oracles may be found in Isa 40-55. In this section, the most forceful and overt polemics function to emphasize that YHWH alone restores Israel for his glory. In the midst of describing the majesty of Israel's Sovereign and the redemption he brings, Isaiah uses the

⁹⁷ While many have attempted to separate these distinct forms into diverse sources, this overlooks the continuity of the book. Some see the trial speeches as "non-Isaian insertions" (e.g., Richard J. Clifford, "The Function of Idol Passages in Second Isaiah," *CBQ* 42 [1980]: 450). Yet the juxtaposition of these forms is intentional. To take one example, the transition from the weal of the end of 40 to the beginning of woe of 41 the passage hinges on the word חלִיפוֹ. Those hoping in YHWH renew their strength (יחליפוֹ בַח, 40:31) while YHWH summons the nations/idols to renew their strength in preparation for his trial speech (יחליפוֹ בַח, 41:1). See also below.

polemic genres to magnify YHWH and to deprecate other gods.⁹⁸ This type of transition has already been seen in Isa 45. Inasmuch as he has discredited all other sources of help and hope, YHWH alone stands as the One who may redeem.

Isaiah 44:24-46:13 continues the alteration between woe and weal and describes how YHWH exalts Cyrus to restore his people for his glory. This pericope begins with an oracle of salvation: YHWH establishes the future Persian king Cyrus for his own purposes and delight (44:24-45:4) without any assistance, for there is no other god who does this (45:5-6). Next, he transitions into dispute language as YHWH's nature as Creator is juxtaposed with the helplessness of created gods (45:7-19).⁹⁹ Preceded by an introductory formula (הַתְּנִיחוּ...הַקִּבְצוּ, 45:20), a short trial speech in Isaiah 45:20-21 concludes with a verdict: "There is no other god who justifies and delivers, not one" (45:21). Chapter 45 ends with a salvation oracle—YHWH's sure word has guaranteed his salvation to those who turn to him (45:22-25). The following chapter continues the theme of Cyrus' domination and primarily consists of the two polemic genres: a dispute (46:1-4), trial speech (46:5), and another dispute (46:6-11). The first dispute contrasts how the idols must *be carried* by beasts while YHWH carries Israel (46:1-4). In a brief trial speech, YHWH interrogates (מִי) his opponent (46:5) and once again proclaims the incomparability of Israel's God, through a second dispute in the chapter (46:6-11). Chapter 46 closes with a brief oracle of salvation promising the eventual vindication of

⁹⁸ According to Jeffrey J. Niehaus, YHWH's theophanies bring both salvation and judgment under the auspices of the covenant (*God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* [SOTBT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 142).

⁹⁹ Clifford agrees that the passage is full of "vivid contrasts essential to preaching" ("The Function of Idol Passages," 451). Moreover the idol passages serve as a foil to the relationship between Israel and YHWH (ibid., 464).

sinful Israel (46:13). Thus, by alternating these different forms within this section (44:24-46:13), Isaiah describes the exclusive Creator's restoration of Israel by means of his anointed Cyrus.

The Creator of all nations extends his hand to all. Having once again demonstrated the sheer incomparability of YHWH and the relative worthlessness of every other nation or god, the Sovereign calls those far off (at "the ends of the earth," אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ), who are like the do-nothing idols ("nothings of the earth," אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ), to turn to him for salvation (45:22, see below). Since all else is wanting, Isaiah shows that the only source of hope and help for *all* humanity is YHWH. This is done, in part, through the intertwining of polemic and salvation oracle forms. The passage may be structured as follows:

44:24-45:8	Oracle of Salvation
45:9-19	Dispute
45:20-21	Trial Speech
45:22-25	Oracle of Salvation
46:1-4	Dispute
46:5	Trial Speech
46:6-11	Dispute
46:13	Oracle of Salvation

4.3 Summary

Isaiah arranges his prophecy to transition from woe (1-39) to weal (40-66) in order to communicate how YHWH alone can restore and redeem. Within Isa 45, he illustrates the inadequacy of false gods and those who serve them by using three specific forms: oracles of salvation, disputes, and trial speeches. Schoors rightly concludes that "the unicity of Yahwe" is the intention of the trial speech and salvation oracles within 45:20-25. YHWH's exclusivity and uniqueness reinforces Isaiah's audience with confidence in the

only Creator and Deliverer.¹⁰⁰ We will now see how this theme of YHWH's incomparability flows throughout the book.

¹⁰⁰ Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour*, 237.

5. LITERARY-THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF ISAIAH 45

The incomparability of YHWH is a major literary theme in Isa 40-55 and contrasts with the utter nothingness of the idols and idolaters. Through the various trial scenes described above, Isaiah shows that Israel's God alone stands as a source of hope and help for eighth-century Judah—no one and nothing else remotely corresponds to him. This chapter will examine the uniqueness of YHWH in comparison to the insignificant idols, and will demonstrate that, inasmuch as one becomes what he or she worships, those who worship inconsequential images are accounted as “nothing” (טפס).

5.1 Incomparability of YHWH vs. Insignificance of Idols/Idolaters

From the beginning of the book YHWH's incomparability is emphasized. Israel's Sovereign brings a covenant lawsuit (*rib*) against his people for transgressing his Law—the first commandment of which is to worship YHWH exclusively.¹⁰¹ The God and Creator of all, not merely the local high place, directs the course of history and raises up nations to punish his people according to his covenant stipulations. Despite Israel's disobedience, YHWH purposes to save her through his own might, with no assistance from other gods or any created thing in order that Israel might receive his blessing once again and subsequently bless all nations. Isaiah demonstrates that YHWH is the sole source of hope and a genuine succor.

Isaiah proves YHWH's incomparability by describing his matchless character.

Throughout Isaiah 40-55, YHWH discloses his own uniqueness and character. The

¹⁰¹ The author recognizes the presence of the theme of obedience/disobedience to the Law in Isaiah but acknowledges that the topic is beyond the nature of the present work (e.g., the earth is laid waste because of the violation of the ancient covenant [הפרו ברית עולם, 24:5]; law obedience (משפט) is not found in the land [1:16]).

refrain **אני יהוה** appears eight times in Isaiah 45 alone.¹⁰² The God of Israel reveals himself (**אני**...) as the only YHWH (**יהוה הוא שמי**, 42:8, 51:15; cf. Isa 43:3, 11, 13; 45:5, 6, 18, 22; 46:9; 48:17; 49:23), creator (**עשה/בורא**, 43:15, 44:24; cf. 48:13), king (**מלככם**, 43:25), protector of his vineyard (**נצר**, 27:2), defender (**אריב**, 49:25; cf. 54:11), comforter (**מנחמכם**, 51:12), savior (**מושיעך/אושיע**, 49:26, 26), preparer (**לפניך**, 45:2; cf. 45:13), the first and the last (**ראשון/אחרון**)¹⁰³, 41:4, 44:6, 48:12), the one *with* Israel (**עמך/אתך**, 41:1; 43:2, 5), Israel's God (**אלהיך**, 41:10, 13; 43:3; 48:17), the strengthener (**מחזיק**, 41:13), helper (**עוזריך**, 13), covenant keeper (**אֶהְבֶּתִּיךָ**, 43:4; cf. 46:4), answerer (**אענם**, 41:17), and declarer of the future (**קראתיך/מגיד**, 42:6, 9; 43:12; 45: 3, 7, 8, 12; cf. Isa 43:10; 45:18; 48:12, 15, 16; 52:6; 54:16 [2x]). YHWH's manifold perfections are inextricably linked to his character.

Isaiah fills the trial speeches with rhetorical questions, using the refrain “Who (**מי**) is like YHWH?” Forty-three of the 61 occurrences of **מי** in Isa are placed within 40-55, only Job uses **מי** more frequently than Isaiah. Not unlike Job 38, the prophet depicts YHWH as berating his adversaries with questions in order to demonstrate his uniqueness: Who created the cosmos? (40:12, 26); who aids YHWH in his plan? (40:13-14); who can stay his hand? (43:13; cf. 14:27); to whom may he be compared? (**דמה**); who is his likeness? (**דמות**, 40:18, 25); who is like him? (**כמוני**, 44:7); who stirs up Cyrus for his purpose? (41:2); who ordains and declares the future (41:4, 26; 45:21)? The reply, implied or explicit is **הלווא אני יהוה ואין עוד** (Is it not I, YHWH, and no one else? 45:21).

¹⁰² This is the fourth most in one chapter for the entire Hebrew Bible: Lev 19 (16x), 22 (9x); Ezek 20 (9x), Isa 45 (8x). Furthermore, four of these in Isa are in the expression **אני יהוה אלהיך** (41:10, 13; 43:3; 48:17).

¹⁰³ Isaiah may build this declaration to a crescendo. He begins **אני יהוה ראשון ואחרונים** (41:4), “I am YHWH—the first and with the last,” **אני ראשון ואני אחרון** (44:6), “I am the first, I am the last,” **אני ראשון אף אני אחרון** (48:12), “I am the first, indeed, I am the last.”

Other biblical writers also emphasize YHWH's incomparability. Several of these questions may be found throughout the Bible. Consider, for example the following queries: "Who is like you/me [YHWH]?" (מי כמוך, Exod 15:11 [2x], Deut 33:29; Mic 7:18; Ps 35:10, 71:19; 89:9; מי כמוני, Isa 44:7; Jer 49:19, 50:44; cf. Job 36:22, Neh 6:11); who is a god (מי אל) who acts as mightily? (Deut 3:24); what god is there (מי אל) except (מבלעדי) for YHWH? (2 Sam 22:32); what god (מי אל) acts so graciously and forgives? (Mic 7:18); what god (מי אל) is as holy and awesome as YHWH (Mic 7:18)? Even the name of Isaiah's contemporary Micah's name means "Who is like YHWH?"¹⁰⁴ The biblical writers continually emphasize that YHWH is unique.

One of the first ways in which Israel learns of YHWH's matchless character is the exodus—the definitive moment when YHWH reveals exactly who he is. Indeed, YHWH responds unforgettably to Pharaoh's reviling words "Who is YHWH?" (מי יהוה, Exod 5:2). The haughty king and his people will know who speaks the words "I am YHWH" (וידעו כי אני יהוה, Exod 14:4). The awesome events of the exodus leave the covenant community not with the question, "Who *is* YHWH?" but "Who *is like* YHWH?" The congregation will sing, "Who is like you among the gods, YHWH? (מי כמוכה באלים) Who is like you (מי כמוכה) majestic in holiness, dreadful in praise, working wonders? (Exod 15:11).¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the Psalms reverberate with the question who, like the God of Jacob, delivers? (מציל, Ps 35:10); who possesses else righteous? (צדקתך, Ps 71:19); who among the heavenly host is comparable? (בני אלים, Ps 89:6); or who else is enthroned on high

¹⁰⁴ Throughout the Hebrew Bible other individuals have similar names that ask comparable questions (מיכאל, "Who is like God?"; מיכהו, "Who is like him?"; מיכיה or מיכיהו, "Who is like YHWH?").

¹⁰⁵ Space does not permit a thorough analysis of YHWH's exclusive characteristics expressed through the Bible, let alone the exodus. Needless to say, Exod 34:5-7 offers a small, but significant list of the characteristics that set YHWH apart (cf. Mic 7:18-20!).

(המגביהי לשבת, Ps 113:5)? When YHWH asks מי כמוני (Who is like me?, Isa 44:7; cf. 40:18, 25), the community has learned to reply with one voice, אין (There is no one).

Nothing and no one compares to YHWH—he is completely unique. The exact phrase אין עוד is specifically emphasized in Isa 45:5, 6, 18 (46:9; cf. 1 Kgs 8:60, Joel 2:27). There is nil (אפס, Isa 45:6, 14; 46:9), nothing (אין, Isa 42:26 [3x], 28 [2x]; 43:11, 12, 13; 44:6, 8, 12; 45:5, 6, 14, 21 [2x], 22; 50:2 [4x]; cf. 40:16, 17; cf. Ps 86:8) besides (בלעדי, Isa 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:6, 21, cf. 36:10) or apart (זולה, Isa 45:5, 21) from him.¹⁰⁶ Isaiah reiterates time and again that there is no god but YHWH.¹⁰⁷ While many attributes describe the incomparable God of Israel, Isaiah anchors YHWH's particularity in his *exclusivity*. For example, consider Isa 45:5-6:

I am YHWH	<u>אני יהוה</u>
and there is no other	ואין עוד
besides me there is no god	זולתי אין אלהים
I strengthen you	אאזרך
yet you do not know me	ולא ידעתני
so that they may know	למען ידעו ממזרח-שמש
from the rising of the sun	
and from the west	וממערבה
that there is none apart from me	כי-אפס בלעדי
I am YHWH	<u>אני יהוה</u>
and there is no other	ואין עוד

¹⁰⁶ A non-theological illustration of uniqueness may be seen in 1 Sam 21:10, where David speaks with Ahimelek about Goliath's sword. Ahimelek says that there is no weapon except for it where he is אין אחרת בזה ויאמר דוד אין כמוה to which David responds that it is entirely unique: אין כמוה.

Some see the *šema'* as another instance of describing YHWH's uniqueness, "Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone" (J.C.L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998], 28).

¹⁰⁷ As Labuschagne says, "In Deutero-Isaiah, as nowhere else in the Old Testament, God's uniqueness is repeatedly emphasized" (*The Incomparability*, 122-23).

Isaiah reiterates the phrase “there is no other” to describe that exclusivity is part and parcel of *who* YHWH is. The second half of the statement “I am YHWH” is “and there is no other.”¹⁰⁸

Throughout Scripture, one understands that Israel’s God is entirely “other” and cannot be likened to anything else, for he alone acts in history. Apart from YHWH (זולתי), no one else saves (מושיע, Hos 13:4). No one else helps in distress (עזר, 2 Chron 14:10) for there is no one with him (עמִיד, 2 Chr 14:10). Such expressions function, as Labuschagne says, “not merely [as] a *captatio benevolentiae*, but a creedal confession expressing the belief that Yahweh is incomparable as a helper.”¹⁰⁹ Jeremiah 10:16 also declares that YHWH is not like those (לא־כאלה) false idols who have no breath (רוח, Jer 10:14). YHWH is the only God because he is the one who creates, helps, purposes, honors, is present, and is preeminent. The idols and idolaters are a mere parody of YHWH, comparatively nothing.

5.1.1 YHWH is Creator, All Else is Created

YHWH’s nature as Creator distinguishes him from the idols and demonstrates that he is a sufficient source of help. Isaiah focuses on this topic first in ch. 29 and repeats it often in 40-55, describing YHWH as the one who creates (ברא), stretches out creation (נטה), and fashions the cosmos (יצר; 40:22, 42:5, 44:24, 45:12, 51:13). Not only did YHWH create

¹⁰⁸ Isa 45:5, 6, 18, 21; cf. 2 Sam 7:22; Isa 43:11; Jer 10:6; Joel 2:27; 1 Chr 17:20; 2 Chr 14:10.

¹⁰⁹ Labuschagne, *The Incomparability*, 87. He continues, “Thus the main idea in the confession of Yahweh’s incomparability in both prayers is that there is no one like Him in whom man in distress can put his trust, for there is none like Him able to help in a struggle” (ibid.).

the earth but he even created the idolater who, in turn, fashions the idols.¹¹⁰ Thus Israel's God is the only sovereign Creator.

YHWH's works are marvelous, whereas idols are the work of human hands.

YHWH's deeds (מעשה) are wonderful and strange (Isa 25:1 28:21). They involve punishing sins (10:12), enacting salvation in a general sense (3:24; 5:12, 19; 26:12), and redeeming Israel (29:23, 60:21. 64:7). An idol, on the other hand, is created—the *work* of man's hands (מעשה ידיים, Isa 2:8, 17:8, 37:19; cf. Hos 8:4; Mic 5:13).¹¹¹ While YHWH wisely lays out (נטה) the universe, *created* man lays out (נטה) the blueprint of his god and *makes it* with skill (Isa 44:12-14).¹¹² Not only is an idol not self-existent, it also depends on an equally dependent creature. Conversely, YHWH is completely transcendent and everything depends on him.

Since YHWH gives man his very breath, humanity has no right to speak back to his Maker; moreover man would be entirely foolish to seek sustenance from any other source. Compared to the Creator, the nations are but a speck in a bucket, and all flesh is grass—considered as nothing (40:6-8, 15; 51:12). How foolish would it be for a lump of

¹¹⁰ This attribution of YHWH as the creator (ברא) of the craftsman (חרש) was probably offensive to the scribe who produced the *kethib* הן, making the clause conditional—"If I create..." This "corrected" reading is only found in the MT (contra 1QIsa^a, LXX, Syr., TJ) and should be rejected.

¹¹¹ Isaiah 41:25 describes Cyrus as trampling the clay (כמו יוצר ירמס־טיט). While it may be coincidental, one may see a chain of command. YHWH → fashions → man → fashions → idols. In 41:25 YHWH → fashions → Cyrus → tramples → man → fashions → idols. Thus, YHWH not only forms the clay but forms him who controls the clay.

¹¹² Weeks rightly notes that many gods were *not* understood to be creator(s), but "divinity is to be recognized through action and effectiveness: Yahweh is not simply a better or more powerful deity because he has done things which others have not—he is the only one who can be called a deity ("Man-Made Gods? Idolatry in the Old Testament," in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* [ed. Stephen C. Barton; New York: T & T Clark, 2007], 20).

clay to presume to tell its fashioner that he has no hands (Isa 45:9)!¹¹³ How much more foolish would it be for those created to question the purposes of their Maker (29:16-16, 45:9-10; 64:7). Surely the One who created the eye can see (cf. Ps 94:9), and the one who made the hand can act. Indeed, the arm of him who spread out the universe is not too short to save (Isa 59:1; 50:2). The irony strikes Isaiah's hearers—only a fool would turn from the transcendent Ruler of the cosmos and expect any assistance from an entirely feeble, created person, let alone an idol that a *human* fashions.¹¹⁴

5.1.2 YHWH Helps, All Else is Helpless

Isaiah describes YHWH as incomparable since only he can provide genuine help. The question throughout most of the book is *to whom should Judah look for help?*¹¹⁵ Rather than impractical musings, Isaiah challenges his hearers to depend on the God of Israel and nothing else, for YHWH is the only one on whom one should depend (שָׁעוֹן) and trust (בִּטְחָן) for effective (יָעֵל) help (עֲזָרָה).

As the one who upholds the universe, YHWH does not rely on idols for assistance (Isa 42:8). YHWH sustains (סָמַךְ) himself without any help (עֲזָרָה); since no one else is able to enact his salvation, his own arm brings it about (תּוֹשָׁעַת, 59:16; cf. 40:10). He must go to

¹¹³ The text is difficult: הוֹי רַב אֲתִיּעֲצְרוּ חֲרָשׁ אֲתִיּחַרְשֵׁי אֲדָמָה הִיאמֵר חֲמֹר לִיּעֲצְרוּ מִהִתְעַשֶׂה וּפְעֵלֶךְ אִין־יָדַיִם לוֹ. “Woe to those who contend with their maker—a pot among earthen pottery. Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you doing?’ or [will you say] of him who made you, ‘He has no hands!’” The alteration in subject is not uncommon in Isaiah. The emended text of the NJPS and Oswalt agree (*Isaiah* 40-66, 207-209).

¹¹⁴ Ultimately, as Baltzer says, “The manufacturers of idols want to give something form, but the result is in fact ‘formless’ [תִּהְיוּ], ‘nothingness.’ They wish to be creative, and destroy even themselves” (*Deutero-Isaiah*, 194).

¹¹⁵ E.g., Isa 10:20, 26:3, 30:12, 31:1, 36:6, 42:8, 48:2, 50:10.

battle himself—no one’s aid is necessary to assist YHWH trample the nations (63:5), his own arm suffices. Since he is self-sufficient, he can offer assistance to those in need.

Israel may, therefore, expect to find legitimate assistance through the arm of her transcendent Sovereign. YHWH alone brings Israel salvation for his name’s sake (Isa 63:12-19). Moreover, God promises his servant Jacob that he will uphold and help him (להועיל 41:10), for he is the strength of his servant (49:5b). YHWH effectively (להועיל) instructs, giving guidance along the way (48:17). Isaiah’s emphasis on YHWH’s incomparability finds practical import for his hearers as they acknowledge that only Israel’s God provides genuine help—all other sources are deficient.

Throughout the prophecy, Isaiah contrasts the assistance provided by YHWH with that of other nations or gods. Instead of leaning on YHWH (שען, Isa 10:20, 50:10; cf. 30:12, 31:1), his covenant people seek support (סמך, 36:6; cf. 26:3, 48:2) and help (עזר, 31:1) through other means. Isaiah, as well as Jeremiah, uses the verb יעל (to profit, benefit) frequently to describe the respective benefit of YHWH and any other source of help, whether gods or nations.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, Isaiah proclaims that those who form idols (לבלתי הועיל, 44:9, בל-יועילו) will discover that their gods do not profit (יצר-פסל).

Isaiah ridicules the complete powerlessness of other gods compared to YHWH’s self-sufficiency (Isa 59:16). A craftsman take much care to ensure his image will not move, yet he neglects to see the irony that *his idol cannot move* (41:7). Since idols have to be created and propped up onto their pedestal (40:20, 41:7), it is utter folly to expect them to turn and lift one out of distress. Indeed, the Creator of all things carries and

¹¹⁶ Of the 23 occurrences of the root in the Hebrew Bible Jeremiah (7) and Isaiah (8) use it more than all other sources combined.

supports (נשא/עמס) Israel (46:3-4), while weary beasts must lift and bear (נשא/עמס) the Babylonian gods Nebo and Bel (46:1-2). If man is stooped and humbled, how much more will the idols be shamed and destroyed (2:8-9, 2:18; cf. 1:20). Even if one cries to these gods, they will not help, deliver (נצל), or profit (יעל, 57:13). Therefore, Isaiah pleads with his audience to consider their foolishness—if the gods are powerless to sustain themselves, how can one expect any assistance from them?

Likewise, the prophet proclaims that one ought not to rely upon ephemeral dynasties and kingdoms for assistance. Even in the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy, he shows that YHWH undergirds the Assyrian nation for his sovereign purposes; and when his plan is accomplished, he will remove his support (10:12-14). Therefore, Israel should not lean (שען) on Assyria for assistance, for the pagan nation is but a rod in YHWH's hand (10:5). Without his support, Assyria could do nothing. Other nations are no different. Moab's cultic place (במה) will not avail (יוכל, 16:12). The images (מעשה ידי) of Damascus provide no assurance of deliverance; indeed, for the Maker (עשהו, 17:7-8) alone can provide such help. The haughty Babylon envisions herself as the exclusive help (אני ואפסי עוד, 47:8, 10), yet she is weary (יגע) and not even her diviners can quell the disaster YHWH brings about. Furthermore, YHWH taunts Babylon to stand (עמד) in her enchantments, for *perhaps* they could assist (אולי תוכלי, 47:12; cf. 57:11-13), but they cannot even save themselves (לא יצילו את־נפשם), 47:14).¹¹⁷ Isaiah scoffs—"how foolish to trust in transitory kingdoms!" For YHWH is the

¹¹⁷ Or "Save their *necks*."

true King of the cosmos, the nations rise and fall at his command.¹¹⁸ Kingdoms will crumble, but the Creator YHWH will remain, always able to provide help.

Isaiah places chs. 36-39 in his prophecy to illustrate this same point—the King YHWH is the one upon whom Israel must rely for succor. Although Israel trusts (בטח, 30:12, 31:1 cf. 12:2; 26:3, 4; 30:15), leans on (שען, 30:12), and seeks strength and shelter (חסות, עוז) in Egypt, this will only result in shame for the covenant people (30:2-3). The Egyptians will not benefit (יעל, 30:5) because their assistance is pointless and empty (הבל, וריק יעזור). Salvation may be found in YHWH (30:15), yet Israel refuses to look to him and instead seeks assistance elsewhere (30:16).

In the midst of the Assyrian siege (701 BC), the Israelites must decide whom they will trust. From the Rabshakeh's own mouth comes the question of the book *In whom do you trust?* (על-מי בטחת, Isa 36:5). The root בטח appears no less than seven times within five verses (36:4-7, 9) in order to focus on the question—"Where is Judah's trust?" Even the Rabshakeh and Sennacherib recognize that Egypt is of no help or support (בטח, סמך, 36:6). The Assyrians are correct. No other god has been able to deliver; however, as Hezekiah acknowledges, "These were no-gods" (לא אלהים אלה, 37:19-20). Nevertheless, the Assyrians make the faulty assumption that YHWH will be like the other gods and Israel's God will not deliver his people from the Assyrian army (36:19-20; 37:12, 18-19). As the narrative plays out, Hezekiah realizes that he can trust YHWH, since God ordained the very exaltation of Assyria (37:26). Resembling a lifeless rod, Assyria is utterly dependent on YHWH (10:5). Therefore, Assyria's boasting in her strength is like an ax gloating to the one wielding it (10:15). Hezekiah learns not to trust in other gods

¹¹⁸ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 37.

who are but the work of mortal hands (37:19), but in YHWH, the one who holds kingdoms in his hand; therefore, YHWH delivers Judah. However, Hezekiah's political maneuvering with the Babylonian Merodach-baladan demonstrates the short-lived nature of his trust (39). Scarcely has YHWH wrought his deliverance for Judah, but Hezekiah seeks assistance from the rising Babylonian empire. Thus, Isaiah's hearers are left with the question—"Whom will we trust? Shall we look YHWH, other gods, or other nations?" Isaiah beckons his audience to look to their Creator YHWH for help.

5.1.3 YHWH is Purposeful, All Else is Purposeless

As the incomparable, omniscient King of the universe, YHWH not only knows what will occur but he has designed it. Throughout the book of Isaiah, YHWH's plan or counsel (עצה) is contrasted with that of idols and other nations. Only YHWH may proclaim, "My counsel shall be established and I shall accomplish all I desire" (עצתי תקום וכל־חפצִי) (אעשה, Isa 46:10). The Creator works wonderful counsel (פלא עצות, 25:1; 28:21, 29; cf. 9:5), overruling the machinations (עצה) of humanity (7:7-9; 8:9-10). No one can withstand YHWH's purpose; moreover, Israel's Deity relies on no one for counsel in devising his purpose (40:13-17; 41:28).¹¹⁹ YHWH is never surprised and he does not act impetuously—he will accomplish what he has planned (55:8-11), including the election of Israel as his servant to enact that very plan (e.g., 14:1; 41:8, 9). Nonetheless, the God of Jacob has purposes not merely for Israel but for all nations. Isaiah shows that YHWH's plans are universal. The honor and dishonor of nations or cities like Tyre, for example,

¹¹⁹ Remarkably, Reinoud Oosting claims "The purpose of 41:28 is not that the idols are unable to answer Yhwh, but that they are not able to give him advice concerning his proclamation to Zion/Jerusalem" ("The Counsellors of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55: A Proposal to Understand their Role in the Literary Composition," *JSOT* 32 [2008]: 380). Merely five verses prior the idols are scorned for their inability to do *anything*.

derives from the eternal planning (יָעַץ) of YHWH (23:8-12, 41:2-4). The haughty “ax” Assyria is no exception. This nation will be humbled after YHWH uses it to fulfill his foreordained purpose (מַעֲשֵׂהוּ, 10:12; יָעַץ, 14:24-27). While mighty potentates like Cyrus are unaware of YHWH, Israel’s God has ordered their kingdoms (45:5). With this knowledge of YHWH’s universal purposes, Israel may have hope, for YHWH will not abandon them in the impending exile, nor will he allow the schemes of wicked kingdoms overrule his own plan. For only YHWH’s plan will come to pass.

Any plans, then, that do not derive from YHWH will not stand. Israel’s God is unique because only he will actually accomplish what he wishes. Even YHWH’s recalcitrant children cannot confound his plan. By not submitting to YHWH’s word and plan, Judah seeks to enact his own schemes (30:10-11), which only lead to ruin (30:3), for no nation or god can annul YHWH’s purpose or turn back his hand (14:27; cf. 41:28, 43:13). What YHWH has purposed, he will do; no measure of conniving may annul it.

Moreover, YHWH taunts the idols to announce what he alone has purposed (Isa 41:23-24). After calling other gods to the courtroom, the Creator challenges the created images to take counsel together (יִעֲצִוּ, 45:21) and declare the future (cf. 44:7, 46:10), yet they are unable.¹²⁰ Their inability to discern the future stands in contrast not only to YHWH’s foreknowledge but also his foreordination of those very plans. In fact, not only are the idols impotent to foretell the future, they can do neither good nor evil (אֵין־תִּיטִיבוּ)

¹²⁰ Gibson misses the point when he sees in YHWH’s call to the idols the implicit “impression that for the prophet and his exiled audience in Isa 41:22ff. the other gods do very much exist...there is still an unmistakable whiff of rivalry” (*Language and Imagery*, 30, 32). They do nothing because they do not exist.

ותרעו, 41:23). They cannot even see or understand (44:9).¹²¹ Nations like Egypt as well concoct schemes with their nobles, but these designs will not succeed, for YHWH's universal plan overrides any human contrivances (Isa 19:11-15). The matchless YHWH carries out his purpose without the assistance or knowledge of anyone or anything.

5.1.4 YHWH Honors, All Else Dishonors

By means of the trial speeches, YHWH honors his servants and dishonors the idols who bring disgrace to their worshippers. As we have seen above, YHWH appoints Israel to be witnesses of their God's preeminence and glory (12:1-5) and also to declare his praise (תהלתי, 43:21; 60:21). In response, he confirms the testimony of his servants (44:26)—YHWH alone is God. He will not allow them to be ashamed but will vindicate their witness (54:4, cf. 50:7). Indeed, no formed idol can prevail against them in a legal dispute because their vindication is guaranteed (54:17).¹²² Israel will be honored by reflecting YHWH's matchless character (see below).

¹²¹ One finds this theme elsewhere in Scripture, biblical authors also jeer at images that are fashioned with sensory organs yet cannot perceive anything (Jer 10:1-10; Ps 115:3-8, 135:15-18). Cf. Isa 41:4, 44:6, 48:12 for the idea of God being outside of time.

¹²² Isaiah 54:17 follows one of the final trial speeches and also contains legal language (צדקתם, תרשיעי, לשון). This verse may be another instance of Israel condemning the idols. First, they condemn what is formed. Given Isaiah's propensity to use יצר to describe the work of idolatrous craftsman, it is not difficult to understand the reference of יוצר to be idols, especially within the greater context (44:9, 10, 12). Secondly, any reference to weaponry is foreign to the context. Every translation consulted renders the opaque כלי as "weapon." However, one is hard-pressed to find contextual warrant for this gloss (cf. Ezek 16:16 where כלי are made into צלמים). Thirdly, the preposition על is best understood as causal and not a *dativus incommodi* (i.e., "against you"), especially in light of the preceding verse. Fourthly, the next occurrence of צלח (55:11) also describes veracity of YHWH's word (לא-ישוב אלי ריקם). Therefore the author proposes the following translation:

הן גור יגור אפס מאותי	Behold, the one showing enmity is not from me
מי-גור אתך עליך יפול	Whoever contends with you shall fall <i>because</i> of you
הנ[ה] אנכי בראתי חרש	Behold I have create the craftsman
נפח באש פחם ומוציא כלי למעשהו	He breathes into the fire of charcoals and brings out the thing from his work

The result of the court proceedings shame the idols and demonstrate that they are worthless. YHWH disgraces the idols in no uncertain terms; they are pronounced (הן) *to be* nothing (אתם מאין), and *their deeds* (מעשה) are worthless (אפע, 41:24).¹²³ In contrast, YHWH's deeds (מעשה) are wonderful, as we have seen above. Here, the Creator mocks the created, do-nothing images. There is virtually no court case—the idols do not even present their arguments, for they cannot speak—much less do anything! Therefore, the images are ashamed and confounded, as are those who trust in them (41:11-12; 42:17, 45:21; cf. 65:11).

YHWH vindicates his witnesses, while the idols bring shame to their makers, whom Isaiah derides with jeers. After God promises to renew the strength of those who trust in him (חלף, 40:31), he summons the makers of idols to muster themselves with their idols (חלף, 41:6-7). YHWH also beckons the wicked to take heart in order to contend with Israel and her Defender (46:8). Yet in spite of the idolaters' efforts, their fate is

ואנכי בראתי משחית לחבל	And I create the devastator for ruin
כל-כלי יוצר עליך לא יצלח	Every vessel (i.e., opposing idol) formed shall not succeed <i>because of you</i>
וכל-לשון תקום-אתך למשפט תרשיעי	And every tongue rising with you in judgment shall be condemned
זאת נחלת עבדי יהוה	This is the lot of the servants of YHWH
וצדקתם מאתי נאם-יהוה	And their vindication is from me, declares YHWH.

¹²³ Schoors agrees, "When in the conclusion of a pericope it is stated that the gods are nothing, such can be regarded as the sentence pronounced by a judge" (*I Am God Your Saviour*, 242).

אפע is a hapax with varied textual witnesses. 1QIsa^a omits the word; Targum Jonathan translates אפע like אפס (41:24, 29). אפס may have been the original reading however it seems more likely the Aramaic attempts to make sense of the infrequent verb. The LXX translators had a difficult time with both vs 24 (אפע → εἰς ἀπάντη [an answer to misunderstood מאין → ποθεν, Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 647] and 29 and give no clear indication of the *Vorlage*. The Peshitta uses ܐܦܫܐ which is never used to translate אפס. The word is found at Qumran parallel to שוא (e.g., 1QHa x:27; because of its occurrence in Isaiah?). Thus it is best to leave the word as understood in the MT. Barthélemy agrees: "Une correction en מִאִפֹּס serait en tout cas ici inutile, sans fondement textuel et probablement erronée" (*Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament* (Vol. 2: Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations; OBO 50/1; eds. A.R. Hulst, et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986], 295).

shame and disgrace (בוש, בלם, פחד; 44:11; 45:16). Indeed, most of the taunts in Isa 40-55 are targeted at the makers of images. Isaiah calls them blind and dumb witnesses who are but a void (תהו, 44:9). In the same way, every nation that relies on false gods can expect utter shame. Egypt's idols tremble as YHWH comes (19:1). Although the Egyptians seek their gods, YHWH will dry up the Nile, the pride of Egypt (19:3-10). He will consign their "no-gods" (לא אלהים) to defilement and shame them through flames and annihilation (ותאבדום, נתן את־אלהיהם באש; 37:19). Those who trust in the nations for deliverance shall be devastated (חתת) and ashamed (בוש) of their previous hope (20:5). Similarly, all who rely on idols will be abashed (בוש, 42:17; 44:9, 11; 45:16; cf. 21:9). Idolaters receive greater disgrace than the idols, for they are the ones foolish enough to hope in a work of *their* hands. The nations and their gods provide no expectation of deliverance but only derision.

5.1.5 YHWH Offers Hope, All Else is Hopeless

Isaiah encourages his hearers to find their only hope in YHWH. Israel's God enacts the curses outlined in the covenant but not without feeling pain or remorse for his people (Isa 30:15, 18; 63:9; 65:1-2). He does not mete out his retribution rashly; instead, his vengeance displays his justice and ultimately refines Israel's dross and alloy (סיג...בדיל; 1:25). YHWH's people receive their just due. Nevertheless, there is hope, since this punishment is commensurate with the crime (40:2). Rather than being subject to a capricious, foreign monarch, who seeks only to subjugate more territory, the exile and all of its ramifications come from a purposive, foreordaining God. Israel has no reason to complain that YHWH is unaware or unwilling to assist in their difficulty (40:27-28,

49:14-20), for unlike the idols, he is the omniscient Creator, who cares for his people. From the beginning of the book, Isaiah proclaims that the land will be laid waste, (1:7) but there is hope for the future when the inhabitants of that land will be called “the City of Righteousness,” “a Faithful Town” (1:26). Since YHWH is enthroned as king throughout even the most tumultuous times (6:1), Israel may find solace in the midst of calamity because a greater purpose exists—YHWH has a plan.

Idols and idolaters are no source of help because can do nothing, for they *are nothing*. Isaiah uses the words אפס and אין to describe the worthlessness of everyone and everything compared to YHWH (see below). Those who quarrel (ריב/צוה) with the seed of Abraham will perish (אבד) and become אין and אפס (Isa 41:11). The adverb אין occurs nine times within Isa 41, five times within vs. 26 and 28.¹²⁴ Isaiah uses this term and the similar אפס to emphasize the sheer lack of rival to YHWH, for he alone declares the future. No one (אין) declares (מגיד) or makes YHWH’s plan heard (משמיע, 41:26b). Thus, every idol or idolater who sets him or herself with or against YHWH is worthless. Isaiah 41:29 calls any who would attempt to do such אין, for their own accomplishments (מעשה) are nothing (אפס), and their images are a breath (רוח)—utter emptiness (תהו).¹²⁵ Isaiah sees the idols, their works, and their worshippers and declares that they are nothingness.

¹²⁴ This word occurs more in Isaiah than any other biblical book (92x out of 686; 38 of these within Isa 40-48).

¹²⁵ The Masorites accented the four adjectives to come in pairs: והתהו נסכיהם רוח ומעשיהם אפס אין כלם, “Behold all of them, a nothing-delusion are their works; an empty wind are their images.” Thus רוח והו is understood as a hendiadys (cf. *WHS* §72).

Cf. Hezekiah’s prayer where he describes the other nations’ gods as no gods (המה לא אלהים) but the works of human’s hands therefore those nations perished (Isa 37:19). In contrast to the idols who produce nothing, humanity is YHWH’s handiwork (Isa 29:16, 23; 64:7).

While it is difficult to prove, one *may* see a secondary polemic leveled against Marduk or Ea/Enki, who in the eighth-to seventh-centuries was gaining ascendancy in both Assyria and Babylon (T. Abusch, “Marduk,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 546). As Marduk came

Isaiah's intransigent stance stems from a concern for Israel to hope and trust in YHWH for assistance. The prophet desires his audience to seek YHWH for practical support. "[T]he main idea" of "confessional" descriptions of YHWH's incomparability, says Labuschagne, "is that there is no one like Him in whom man in distress can put his trust, for there is none like Him able to help in a struggle."¹²⁶ Throughout the entire Hebrew Bible, YHWH's uniqueness coincides with his exclusivity and immanence, both flowing from his matchless character. Labuschagne sums up YHWH's uniqueness compared to idols:

Those gods, unlike Yahweh, cannot redeem; they cannot rescue nor render assistance to those involved in an unequal struggle; they are unable to do justice; they are not rock; they do not hear when there is a call for help; they are not living gods; they have not proved mighty in battle; they have not attempted to go and take a nation for themselves; they are unable to work miracles; they cannot actively carry a nation, but have to be carried; they neither command, nor decide, nor know the future; they are never 'single'; they are no-gods, futilities and, being the work of human hands, totally insignificant.¹²⁷

YHWH alone is the one who creates, helps, purposes, honors, and offers hope; compared to him, all else is nothing.

5.2 We Become What We Worship

Throughout the Bible, numerous passages describe how worshippers reflect the object of their adoration. On the basis of these texts, G.K Beale has argued extensively that one

from Ea's abode the *apsû*, so his worshippers become like their master 𒂗𒂗𒂗. Archaeologists have found an "apsû tank" built for the Assyrian king Sennacherib (Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* [il. by Tessa Richards; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992], 27). Enki or Ea is the creator god who determines destinies (ibid., 75). Marduk's worship has been compared to an early monotheism (ibid., 129).

¹²⁶ Labuschagne, *The Incomparability*, 87.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 148.

may conclude, “What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration.”¹²⁸

Oftentimes, Beale argues, biblical descriptions of “sensory organ malfunction” relate to a “retributive taunt” against idolatry in and outside of the community of Israel.¹²⁹ We will find that this thinking is also prevalent in Isaiah, who jeers both idol and idolater while he magnifies YHWH and his worshippers.

Even from the beginning of his prophecy, Isaiah warns idolaters that they will reflect what they worship. The prophet cautions that those who worship a terebinth (אֵיל) or gardens (גִּנוֹת) shall be like the same (כִּי תִהְיוּ כִּנְוֹכֵי...¹³⁰). They shall resemble a terebinth *along with* its withered leaves. They will image their choice gardens, and they shall be waterless (Isa 1:30).¹³⁰ Similarly, YHWH commands Isaiah to make his audience like the idols they worship—completely imperceptive (6:9-10).¹³¹ Other descriptions of the idolaters’ idol-like blindness and imperceptibility are pervasive in Isaiah. Those who make images have no understanding (44:18-19) and deceive themselves (44:20). However, this imperceptibility is not limited to foreign nations. Like dumb dogs, Israel’s leaders also do not know anything (56:10-11, cf. 29:9-11). Therefore, YHWH punishes

¹²⁸ *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 16. Beale’s works on the topic include *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 357-468; *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; ed. D.A. Carson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81-122; and “Isaiah VI 9-23: A Retributive Taunt Against Idolatry” *VT* 41 (1991): 258-78. Obviously Beale works from a Christian perspective and includes both the Hebrew Bible and NT in his analysis. An analysis into the NT theology surrounding Beale’s thesis is beyond the scope of the present work.

¹²⁹ “Isaiah VI 9-23: A Retributive Taunt,” 273.

¹³⁰ The author arrived at the interpretive conclusion independently and was subsequently confirmed by Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 52-54. Beale takes this thought further by claiming that several references to stump imply destroyed idols, who are subsequently burned (e.g., Isa 1:31, 6:13; *ibid.*, 52-63).

¹³¹ Beale’s own thesis was derived from this passage (*We Become What We Worship*, 11; cf. Beale, “Isaiah VI 9-13: A Retributive Taunt Against Idolatry,” 257-78).

his people, for they are as blind as their idols (42:17-25; 49:10).¹³² These taunts function “to indicate mockingly that the worshiper, rather than experiencing an expected life-giving blessing, has received a curse by becoming as spiritually inanimate, empty, rebellious or shameful as the idol is depicted to be.”¹³³ The idolaters take the form of their image. All those who form idols (Isa יצרי-פסל כלם) are empty (תהו); although they serve as witnesses of their gods, they are imperceptive (בל-ייראו ובל-ידעו, 44:9). They do not know (ידעו) or understand (יבינו), for their eyes are smeared like their gods.¹³⁴ Thus, YHWH declares (הן) that they will be confounded and terrified (44:11). Those who worship insignificant things will become similarly insignificant.

On the other hand, those who worship YHWH reflect his image; they rightly perceive and act righteously. The entire testimony of Scripture shows that YHWH created man in his image to spread his universal theocratic kingdom.¹³⁵ However, man

¹³² For greater discussion on this topic see also Edward P. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart: A Study in Biblical Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006). One also finds similar aspersions in Ps 115:3-9 and Ps 135:15-18 where the worshipper reflects his god.

¹³³ *We Become What We Worship*, 21.

¹³⁴ Two interesting observations may be made about the verb טוח. First, Isaiah may once again ridicule idolaters by comparing them to their images. The infrequent verb טוח as well as its bi-form טוח (see below) may have been used to describe the creation of idols. Authors typically use other verbs to describe the creation of idols (e.g., צרך, נסך). Isaiah describes part of the creation of the image as *overlaying* it with gold and silver (40:19). Elsewhere the verb טוח usually denotes plastering (e.g., Lev 14:42), yet 1 Chr 29:4 uses the verb טוח to describe overlaying the walls of the temple *with gold and silver*. Thus the idols’ witnesses have equally “overlaid” eyes—both are imperceptive.

Secondly, the verb טוח is usually pointed as a bi-consonantal טוח, additionally the subject and verb do not agree (טוח...עיניהם). This is usually understood as an alternate form of the geminate. Although unattested in the witnesses, an initial *yod* may have been lost through haplography rendering the original כִּי יטוח. Thus YHWH may be the agent who smears their eyes (ESV agrees, cf. 6:10; 29:10). Deirdre Dempsey takes this to be the *idols* who are imperceptive; while this is true, the context before and after describes the idols makers (“Verb Syntax of Isaiah 44:9-20,” in *Imagery And Imagination In Biblical Literature, Essays in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald. F.S.C.* [ed. Lawrence Boadt and Mark S. Smith; CBQMS 32; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2001], 148).

¹³⁵ Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 42-61. Herein lays another biblical-theological discussion beyond the

sinned, fell, and subsequently marred his image of God. Therefore, YHWH purposes to establish his theocratic kingdom once again by conforming the Davidic king to YHWH's image and empowering him through the Spirit of YHWH in order that the rule of the Creator's representative be established in righteousness, justice, and equity (Isa 9:5-6, 11:1-10). As YHWH's kingdom expands and people turn to serve and worship him, YHWH's image-bearers shall be restored—no longer shall they receive the “anesthetizing”¹³⁶ effects of their idolatry. For when the Davidic ruler takes the throne, the eyes of the blind shall see (29:18-21, 32:3-5, 35:6), and those who turn to YHWH, regarding him as their King, shall not be “sick” but forgiven of their iniquity (עון, 33:24).¹³⁷ Thus, those who so dimly reflect YHWH will once again radiate his glory. Even foreigners who attach themselves to YHWH shall experience similar glorification (56:3). Therefore, we see that those who worship and honor YHWH shall reflect his image to their glory—no more shall they mirror blind and imperceptive gods.¹³⁸

Furthermore, those who worship YHWH reflect his righteous character. YHWH shall make those who serve him righteous (צדקות) and grant his people strength (עז), justification (יצדקו), and glory (תהללו, 45:24-25). Indeed, their raiment shall be Salvation (61:10-11).¹³⁹ YHWH will place in Zion his salvation and glory (תשועתי...תפארתו),

nature of the present work. For more discussion on the original role for humanity's dominion see *ibid.*, as well as Beale, *The Temple and Church's Mission*.

¹³⁶ Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 268-69

¹³⁷ More often than not, Isaiah's reference to sickness involves *spiritual* ailment (cf. 1:6, 30:26, 53:5).

¹³⁸ A thorough investigation of the *imago Dei* is beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say, humankind was created to image YHWH but through the fall his image was marred but may be restored through conforming to Christ—the exact image of YHWH (cf. Col 1:15). For a thorough discussion see Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 268-283; Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 62-90; Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes*, 83-115. McKenzie rightly claims that Isaiah deliberately reverses Gen 1:26-27, “God made man in his image and likeness, and now deluded man makes God in his image” (*Second Isaiah*, 68).

46:13), and his people Israel shall *be* glorious (60:19, 62:2). Given a new name, the redeemed community shall be a crown in the hand of YHWH (62:3-4; cf. 28:1). Isaiah shows that the idolatrous reflect their gods to their shame, while those who worship YHWH reflect him to their glory and vindication.

5.3 Summary

Isaiah demonstrates that the Creator YHWH helps, enacts his purposes, honors, and offers hope. Meanwhile, the idols and those who worship them are created, helpless, have uncertain plans, bring dishonor, and offer no hope—they are nothing compared to YHWH. Isaiah starkly contrasts every other god or nation to whom one may look for help with YHWH:

YHWH	All Else
Creator	Created
Purposeful	Purposeless
Helps	Helpless
Honors	Dishonors
Offers Hope	Hopeless
Existentially Present	Existentially Absent
Ontologically Ultimate ¹⁴⁰	Ontologically Nothing

Isaiah provokes his hearers to consider the source of their hope and trust, and he urges them to look to the incomparable YHWH. Throughout the entire Hebrew Bible, YHWH’s incomparability is connected with “the fact that *He intervenes in history as the*

¹³⁹ Space does not permit an inquiry into the current discussion of imputed righteousness. For a compelling discussion within the concept in Isaiah see Thomas D. Petter, “The Meaning of Substitutionary Righteousness in Isa 53:11: A Summary of the Evidence” *TrinJ* 32 (2011):165-189.

¹⁴⁰ Obviously this statement requires some unpacking. Perhaps the NT supplies the best illustration. In his letters, Paul describes *Christ* as “ultimate.” Christ fills “all in all” (ἅ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου, Eph 1:23). Moreover, the compounded confessions in Col 1 portray Christ as the ultimate source and goal of all things. Elsewhere, the apostle calls the father “all in all” (πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν, 1 Cor 15:28).

redeeming God.”¹⁴¹ For this reason, Isaiah emphasizes YHWH’s uniqueness in order to demonstrate that Israel’s God is a reliable source of help and hope, for YHWH is the only god who is existentially immanent. Meanwhile, the idols contribute nothing to YHWH’s plan; not only are they ignorant of his purpose, but they can do nothing. Those who praise YHWH shall reflect his glory, whereas those who esteem worthless images become like their object of worship—*nothing*.

¹⁴¹ Labuschagne, *The Incomparability*, 90-91; emphasis original.

6. אִפְסִי IN ISAIAH 45:22

In this chapter we will apply the previous lexical and literary analysis to Isaiah 45:22, and we will see that the phrase אִפְסִי אֶרֶץ in Isa 45:22 not only denotes the idiomatic, geographic phrase “ends of the earth” but also the context specific “nothings” of the earth. This is further demonstrated by recognizing Isaiah’s dependence on the theology and vocabulary of Deut, especially Deut 32-33. The prophet uses אִפְסִי as a derogatory appellation to beckon the nothing-like idolaters to turn to YHWH for salvation. We will first see how Isaiah describes the idols, idolaters, and idolatrous Israelites as אִפְסִי.

6.1 Idols as אִפְסִי

At the end of the first major trial speech (Isa 41), YHWH pronounces the verdict—idols are nothing. As we have seen above, Isaiah introduces the conclusion of several of his legal disputes with the idols with the pronouncement הֵן. Several of these verdicts ultimately describe YHWH’s adversaries as אִפְסִי or אֵין. Consider 41:24, 26b, 28-29:

הַיָּדָאֲתָם מֵאֵין	The verdict: you are less than nothing
וּפְעֵלְכֶם מֵאִפֶּס	and your work is less than worthlessness
תּוֹעֵבָה יִבְחַר בְּכֶם	the [one] choosing you is an abomination
...	...
מִי־הֵגִיד מֵרָאשׁ וְנִדְעָה	Who declared it from long ago that we
	might consider [him]?
וּמִלְּפָנִים וְנֹאמַר צָדִיק	even beforehand that we might say he is
	right?
...	...
אֵף אֵין־מִגִּיד	Indeed there is none declaring
אֵף אֵין מִשְׁמִיעַ	Indeed there is none making it heard
אֵף אֵין־שֹׁמֵעַ אִמְרֵיכֶם...	Indeed there is none hearing your words
וְאֵרָא וְאֵין אִישׁ	And I considered and there was no one
וּמֵאלֶּה וְאֵין יוֹעֵץ	even among these there is no counselor
וְאִשְׁאֵל וְיִשְׁבֹּר דְּבַר	[No one] that if I ask they might reply
הֵן כָּלָם	The verdict of all of them
אִפֶּס <אֵין> ¹⁴² מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם	Nothing, naught are their works
רוּחַ וְתִהְיוּ נִסְכֵּיהֶם	An empty breath are their statues ¹⁴³

In this passage, YHWH provokes the idols to declare the future to prove that they are gods (ונדעה כי אלהים אתם, 41:23), yet they remain dumb with no reply or no defense — they do nothing.

The prophet taunts the images by calling them אִפֶּס. We have seen that YHWH's deeds (מעשים) include the creation of humanity and the cosmos, whereas the images *do* absolutely nothing (אִפֶּס or אֵין), much less create anything. Rather than possessing spirit (רוח) and giving substance or order to the empty cosmos (תהו, Gen 1:2), *idols themselves are* an empty breath (רוח ותהו, 41:29). Isaiah uses the term אִפֶּס to ridicule them and describe the utter void without YHWH: there is nothing besides YHWH (אִפֶּס בְּלִעָדַי,

¹⁴² אֵין, “a disaster,” according to the MT, 1QIsa^a, Syr., and TJ all read this as אֵין which would bring it in line with the preceding verses. The letters י and ו are easily confused and may have been confused in MT. Although the Syr. and TJ translate both אֵין and אֵין with similar glosses, אֵין does not fit as well in the context (so also Watts, *Isaiah*, 647; contra Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 122).

¹⁴³ The NJPS translation says it well: “See, they are all nothingness, Their works are nullity, Their statues are naught and nil” (41:29).

45:6), nothing like him (אפס כמוני, 46:9)—no gods (אפס אלהים, 45:14). Only YHWH is a source of hope and help while the idols *accomplish* nothing and *are* nothing.

6.2 Idolaters as אפס

Previously, we considered how idolaters resemble the gods they worship and ultimately make themselves אפסים as well. Once again, YHWH's verdict in several disputes, introduced by הן, declares that the nations are nothing, just like their gods.

Isaiah uses the dispute form in ch. 40 to magnify YHWH and proclaim that the nations are אפס. The conflict begins with an interrogation (מי...את-מי, Isa 40:12-31) and concludes in 40:15-17. All creation is like dust, a cloud, and fine dust before YHWH.

Everything is considered a small thing before YHWH. Verse 17 concludes:

כל-הגוים כאין נגדו	All the nations are like naught before him
מאפס ותהו	less than nothing ¹⁴⁴ and emptiness
נחשבו-לו	are they considered to him ¹⁴⁵

Isaiah calls the idolatrous nations (גוים) nothing, like their gods.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ 1QIsa^a, the Syrohexapla and Vg. read באפס, connecting the synonymous lines closer. Yet this seems to be an attempt to draw the synonymous lines closer with the comparative preposition.

¹⁴⁵ So also *Sirach* 41:10,

כל מאפס אל אפס ישוב	All from naught will return to naught
כן חנף מתהו אל תהו	So the godless from emptiness to emptiness.

(Pancratius C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and A Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* [VT Sup Vol LXVIII; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997]: 72).

¹⁴⁶ While גוים may designate all humanity, Isaiah usually uses גוים for non-Israelites. Moreover, vs. 17 is followed by another round of questions (ואל-מי...ומה, 40:18) explicitly related to idols (ואל-מי תדמיון אל ומה, 40:18) דמות תערכו לא הפסל (40:18).

Of the 72 occurrences of גוים in Isaiah, the author found only five instances where it is unambiguously attributed to Israel, two of which have negative connotations (e.g., הוי גוי חטא, 1:4; cf. 10:6), the other three simply refer to the nation of Israel (9:2, 26:15; 66:8). Moreover, Isaiah uses the plural in 40:17, which obviously does not designate Israel unambiguously. Additionally, the prophet refers to Israel as a גוי only once in the second half of the book; indeed, Isaiah features the גוים in his polemic (43:9). Although Isaiah uses cosmic language to compare everything with YHWH, this dispute form functions to encourage Israel who was trodden by nations. Isaiah will also mention idols explicitly (see below).

Isaiah also calls Israel's adversaries אפס in Isa 41:11. YHWH proclaims the verdict (הן): those contending (אנשי ריבך) with Israel will be ashamed and abashed; they shall be *like nothing* and perish (כאין ויאבדו). The legal decision (הן) rules in favor of Jacob, for YHWH helps (עזר) him (50:9; cf. 54:15-16). Who (מי) can condemn? None. Everyone contending with Israel will wear out, as if a moth consumes them (יאכלם, 50:9; cf. 54:17). All who dispute with YHWH's people are like אין or אפס.

Isaiah 34:12 also describes the recipients of YHWH's universal reckoning as אפס. In order to vindicate Zion (לריב ציון, 34:8), YHWH will lay waste the earth. Therefore, the land shall be called (אין שם מלכות) "There is No Monarchy There."¹⁴⁷ All of its officials shall be (יהיו) "Nothing" (אפס, cf. 40:23, עשה). The use of אפס as a name or title should not surprise us, since we have already seen that the Phoenician and Akkadian cognates of אפס are used to describe an individual. Additionally, Yahwistic prophets commonly use names for judgment or consolation (e.g., Hos 1:3, 8; 2:1-3). Isaiah also gives new (Isa 1:26; 7:3, 14; 8:1; 19:18; 30:7; 48:2; 48:8; 58:12; 60:14, 18; 61:3; 62:2, 4, 12; cf. 9:6, 45:3-4; 47:5; 49:1; 65:1, 15) or "pet names" for a rhetorical purpose.¹⁴⁸ In this way, Isaiah names the princes אפס in Isa 34:21.

The prophet ridicules the false gods and their worshippers—they are תהו, אין, and אפס. One finds comparable mockery elsewhere. Jeremiah describes both idols and their worshippers as foolish and worthless in light of the Creator YHWH. Jer 10:14-16 reads:

"Every man is *stupid* and *without knowledge* (מדעת); every **goldsmith** is *put to shame* by his **idols** (פסל), for **his images** are *false* (שקר נסכו), and there is *no breath* (רוח) in them. They are *worthless* (הבל), a work of *delusion* (תעתעים); at the time of their punishment *they shall perish* (יאבדו). Not like these is he who is

¹⁴⁷ The NRSV rightly sees this as a prophetic naming and capitalizes "No Kingdom There."

¹⁴⁸ Some "pet names" include ישרון, Isa 44:2; רהב, 30:7, 51:9; cf. ששך, Jer 51:41.

the portion of Jacob, for he is the *one who formed* (יוצר) all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; *the LORD of hosts* is his name (יהוה צבאות שמו)” (ESV; Jer 10:14-16 = Jer 51:17-19; cf. Hab 2:18-20).

Those who trust in idols are like the idols they worship: hopeless, helpless, and accounted as nothing.

6.3 Israelites as אפס

An Israelite who serves idols is no different than other idolaters—they also are אפס. Like the sightless idols and the idolaters who resemble them, idolatrous Israel is blind. On the heels of describing the shame in store for idolaters (42:17), YHWH declares how his servant (עבדי) is blind (עור) and deaf (חרש, 42:18-19; cf. 43:8). Although they are rebellious and obstinate (30:1), YHWH promises to restore his people to the task to which they were called.

Previously, we considered how YHWH addresses other nations in his polemics; however, each of these disputes functions as a warning *for Israel* to avoid similar condemnation. For example, Isa 40 records YHWH’s dispute with the nations, but it concludes by addressing Israel directly (40:27-31). Scheuer understands Israel to be the addressee of each idol-fabrication text. Israel, he claims, is the one with whom YHWH disputes—God’s people are the idol manufacturers.¹⁴⁹ While Scheuer overstates his case (see above), he nonetheless raises a valid point—Israelites are by no means guiltless in regards to idolatry. It is difficult to distinguish between which specific type of idolater is intended in several passages, be it one of the nations or an Israelite. This ambiguity may be intentional. *Anyone* who worships a no-god becomes a no-thing; therefore, Israel should take heed and cease practicing idolatry—the very reason they are blind and deaf.

¹⁴⁹ *The Return of YHWH*, 82-104.

However, as we have seen above, YHWH promises to restore his broken people. He will anoint his Servant to accomplish his task (42:1). This David-like Servant will bear their sins completely and fulfill the covenant stipulations (52:13-53:12); then Israel will perceive rightly (32:3-5; 35:6). At that time Israel will be a light to the nations (49:6), who shall behold God's people's righteousness (61:11).

Thus far, we have noted that YHWH enters into disputes with other gods and their worshippers to demonstrate that they are **עֲבָדִים**. Moreover, Isaiah names idols, idolaters, and idolatrous Israelites **עֲבָדִים**—they are nothing. We will see below that in Isa 45:22, YHWH will beckon those **עֲבָדִים**-idolaters to turn and submit to his sovereignty for their deliverance; however, we will first consider Isaiah's dependence on Deuteronomy and how this informs his polemics against idolatry.

6.4 Isaiah's Use of Deuteronomy 32-33

Isaiah 45 continues the prophet's defense of monotheism—a theology by no means found only in Isaiah. YHWH's exclusivity and the idols' non-existence are described in numerous passages throughout the Hebrew Bible and definitively expressed at Sinai.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Isaiah appears to depend heavily on the monotheistic claims in the fifth book of the Pentateuch and echoes much of its theology and phraseology, particularly of the covenant lawsuit in Deut 32-33.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ The author acknowledges that the understanding of this issue is disputed in biblical studies. This thesis understands monotheism to have been progressively revealed to the patriarchs and unambiguously explained on Sinai. However, a satisfying defense of this stance is well beyond the parameters of the current study.

¹⁵¹ An extensive study into the provenience of Deut 32 is beyond the scope of this paper. The author holds the traditional understanding of Mosaic authorship. Many assume that since Deuteronomy "appears too heavily influenced by the prophetic movement," it must be dated late (Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James*

The book of Isaiah commences by calling upon the cosmos as witness against Israel in a *rib*, which is based on the Covenant lawsuit on the plains of Moab. Consider the verbal affinity in Deut 32:1 and Isa 1:2:

Deut 32:1	Isaiah 1:2
<u>הָאֲזִינוּ</u> הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֲדַבְרָה	<u>שִׁמְעוּ</u> שָׁמַיִם
<u>וְתִשְׁמַע</u> הָאָרֶץ	<u>וְהָאֲזִינוּ</u> אֶרֶץ כִּי יְהוֹה דָּבָר
אֲמַר־פִּי:	

Isaiah 1:2 and Deuteronomy 32:1 *alone* share these four highlighted words

(אֲזִינוּ/שָׁמַיִם/שִׁמְעוּ/אֶרֶץ).¹⁵² From the very start, Isaiah demonstrates that his prophecy is informed by and based on the Covenant at Sinai that Moses recapitulated in Deuteronomy.

Isaiah utilizes certain titles and concepts found only or predominately in Deuteronomy to show that not only does his prophecy demonstrate continuity, but also that Deuteronomy is the foundation for his dispute with Israel. For example, one finds the name Jeshurun (יִשְׁרוּן) ascribed to Israel only in Deut 32-33 and Isaiah 44 (Deut 32:15; 33:5, 26; Isa 44:2); moreover, the appellation is in connection to YHWH's exclusivity and special election of Israel. In Deuteronomy, this name is placed in a context describing how Israel angers YHWH with their foreign, abominable gods (זָרִים, תּוֹעֵבָה). Another example of verbal affinity is the reference to YHWH's care as that of an eagle (נֹשֵׁר, Deut 32:11//Isa 40:31; cf. Exod 19:4, Deut 28:49; Ps 103:5). Those who forsake YHWH and violate the covenant (Deut 32:15) are compared to Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut 32:32//Isa 1:10). Deuteronomy's theology and even vocabulary have shaped Isaiah's own theology and may be seen flowing from the prophet's words.

Muilenburg [ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962], 26). However, the very opposite could be proposed.

¹⁵² Jeremiah uses similar language but only calls to the land (אֶרֶץ, 6:19; 22:29).

Another shared image is YHWH's designation as "Rock" (צור), which is also predominately located in Isaiah and Deut 32, once again in the context of YHWH's exclusivity.¹⁵³ Isaiah associates YHWH's rock-likeness to his salvation (ישע, Isa 17:10), strength (עז, 17:10; cf. 8:14), eternity (עולמים, 26:4), incomparability (44:8), and righteousness (צדק, 51:1). In Isa 51:1, Israel is called to consider the צור from which they were taken; likewise, Deut 32:18 recounts how the צור begot them (ילדך). Even the reference to YHWH's provision of water from the rock (Deut 32:13) has a parallel in Isa 48:21. Isaiah's prophecy abounds in parallels to Deuteronomy.

Although his people dwell in a desert region (ארץ מדבר, Deut 32:10), YHWH has taken and fashioned his chosen Israel to inhabit the land. Both Isaiah and Deut 32 describe YHWH as the one who acquired, created, and established Israel (קנה/עשה/בון, Deut 32:6). This creation of a people was for the purpose of settling (לשבת, Isa 45:18) the land, so that it would not remain desolate (תהו, Deut 32:10//Isa 45:18). Moses describes YHWH's election of Israel in Deuteronomy with the term בחר—the very term Isaiah then uses almost as an appellation for God's people (אתה ישראל עבדי יעקב אשר בחרתיך, Isa 41:8).¹⁵⁴ Isaiah's alteration of themes or terms is almost more telling than verbatim quotations. Whereas Moses tells the covenant community that they are to be a holy people (עם קדוש, Deut 4:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9), Isaiah begins his prophecy by

¹⁵³ Of the eight occurrences of צור in Deuteronomy, seven are in Deut 32. One time, צור refers to the rock out of which YHWH fed the people (v. 13). Every other reference understands YHWH or a parody (v. 37) to be the Rock (4, 15, 18, 30, 31). Outside of the Psalms (24x), צור occurs the most in Isaiah (12x) and Deuteronomy (9x). This appellation is also found at Qumran (e.g., 4Q377 f2ii:7; 4Q504 f1–2rv:19).

¹⁵⁴ E.g., Deut 4:37; Deut 7:6, 7; 10:15; 12:5; 14:2//Isa 41:8, 8; 43:10; 44:1, 2. Moreover, בחר occurs most in Deuteronomy (31) followed by Isaiah (20).

describing Israel as a people laden with sin (עם כבד עון, Isa 1:4)—they are people of Gomorrah (עם עמרה, Isa 1:10)—who have sinned against the *Holy One* of Israel (קדוש ישראל, e.g., Isa 1:4; 10:20; 29:19; 41:14). Isaiah then proclaims that one day the congregation will once again be called a holy people (וקראו להם עם־הקדש, Isa 62:12). While the community may be ignorant of the Law, Isaiah cannot help but speak in the terms influenced by the Torah.

The themes of YHWH's uniqueness and incomparability, as well as many of the other motifs that we have traced above in Isaiah, flow from the theology of Deuteronomy, especially the lawsuit of Deut 32-33. Isaiah understands from Deuteronomy that YHWH alone raises kings and kingdoms; the Sovereign of the universe will not share his glory with anyone. For this reason YHWH restrains his anger lest he destroy Israel with the result that other nations claim that their hands have prevailed (ידנו רמה) and that YHWH himself *did not* accomplish it (ולא יהוה פעל כל־זאת, Deut 32:27). Indeed, Isaiah says it is *YHWH* who raises Cyrus up (Isa 41:1-3). Who *does* this (מי פעל ועשה, 41:4a)? It is YHWH (אני יהוה, 41:4b). As we have seen above, Isaiah describes YHWH's present and future plans as inscrutable. Likewise, Moses says that other nations have no counsel (עצה) or understanding (תבונה, Deut 32:28), nor can they perceive their own future (אחריתם, Deut 32:29). YHWH is the one who upholds his people and exalts and debases rulers of empires according to his purposes, whether Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonia, or Persian.

Deuteronomy 32-33 also demonstrates YHWH's complete uniqueness by declaring that no other god compares. Moses maintains that other gods (אלהים), or false rocks (צור), to which people flee cannot assist (עזר, Deut 32:37-38) because there is no

god but YHWH. YHWH alone (בדד) led the people; there was no foreign god with him (ואין עמו אל נבר, Deut 32:12// ואין בכם זר, Isa 43:12), for Jeshurun's God has no equal (אין, Deut 33:26).¹⁵⁵ Additionally, ch. 32 contains YHWH's emphatic self-declaration: אני אני הוא ואין אלהים עמדי (Deut 32:39). One also notices this emphatic repetition in Isaiah.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, two contiguous first person pronouns (אני אני) occur only three times in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 32:39, Isa 48:15, Hos 5:16); the respective passages in Deuteronomy and Isaiah both come from the mouth of YHWH. Similarly, YHWH also speaks using אנכי אנכי three times in the Hebrew Bible—all within this section of Isaiah (Isa 43:11, 25; 51:12).¹⁵⁷ Consider also the similar language describing YHWH's uniqueness:

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix I.

¹⁵⁶ A repeated word, let alone a pronoun, is certainly suspect to dittography. However, the similarity in contexts demonstrates this echo as well as the relative obscurity of this repetition.

¹⁵⁷ Schorch notes Isaiah's penchant for repeating the same word for "emphasis" (cf. 21:9; 26:3, 15; 38:19; 40:1; 48:11; 51:9, 17; 52:1, 11; 57:14, 19; 58:2; 62:10; "Between Science and Magic: The Function and Roots of the Paronomasia in the Prophetic Books of the Hebrew Bible" in *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* [ed. Scott B. Noegel. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000], 208).

Table 6.1 Synopsis of Isa 43:10c-13, Deut 32:39b, and Isa 45:5-7

Isa 43:10c-13		Deut 32:39		Isaiah 45:5-7	
כי־אני הוא לפני לא־נוצר אל ואחרי לא יהיה	For I am he Before me no god was formed and after me there will be none	ראו עתה	See now,		
אנכי אני יהוה	I, I am YHWH	כי אני אני הוא	For I, I am he	אני יהוה ואין עוד	I am YHWH and there is no other
ואין מבלעדי מושיע	There is no savior apart from me I declare	עמדי ואין אלהים	and there is no god with me	ואין עוד זולתי אין אלהים...	There is none apart from me.
אנכי הגדתי והושעתי והשמעתי	And I save And I make it heard.			כי־אפס בלעדי	There is no God
ואין בכם זר	And there is no foreign [god] among you ...			אני יהוה ואין עוד	For there is none apart from me. I am YHWH There is no other.
... ואני־אל גם־מיום אני הוא	I am God Even from today I am he	אני אמית ואחיה מחצתי ואני ארפא	I take and give life I wound and I heal	יוצר אור ובורא חשך עשה שלום ובורא רע אני יהוה עשה כל־אלה	The one forming light and creating darkness The one making wholeness and creating calamity
ואין מידי מציל אפעל ומי ישיבנה	And there is none who delivers from my hand I act and who can reply	ואין מידי מציל	and there is none who delivers from my hand		I am YHWH who does all of these things

These passages share several ideas: YHWH's self-disclosure, exclusivity, indomitability, and absolute sovereignty—even killing (אמית) and causing calamity (רע). (בורא רע).

Isaiah incorporates Moses' language that describes the idols and those who worship them as אפס-like. Several terms describe the idols/idolaters in Deut 32-33 (e.g., זרים/תועבת/שדים), yet the one most germane to our analysis is לא אלה. In Deut 32:17 and 32:21, Moses calls the false gods “no-god” (לא־אלה). As our previous study has shown, Isaiah utilizes אפס to describe the nothing-like gods, even using the phrase אפס אלהים (Isa 45:14). Hezekiah's prayer also contains comparable language that describes the gods of the vanquished nations (לא אלהים המה, Isa 37:19; cf. Jer 2:19, 5:7, 16:20; 2 Chr 13:9). Additionally, Moses warns that those who spurn YHWH and serve “no-gods” will be spurned by “no-people.” Consider Deut 32:21:

הן קנאוני בלא־אל	They make me jealous with <i>no-gods</i>
כעסוני בהליהם	They vex me with <i>worthless [idols]</i> ¹⁵⁸
אקניאם בלא־עם	I will make them jealous with <i>no-people</i>
בגוי נבל אכעיסם	With a <i>foolish nation</i> I will vex them

The parallelism makes several things clear in this verse: “no-gods” and “no-people” are appellations since both sets of designations are marked by the preposition ב. Secondly, Moses' designation of the potential conquerors as “no people” is not simply a slur but a clear example of *lex talionis*.¹⁵⁹ Most important for our purposes, Moses designates *idolatrous* people as “no-people.”¹⁶⁰ In effect, YHWH says, “If you anger me with idols, I will anger you with idolaters!” The phrasing found in Deut 32-33 is almost exactly the same kind of language and theology Isaiah communicates.

¹⁵⁸ הכעסוני is clearly a designation for idols as the rest of the Hebrew Bible makes clear (cf. Jer 8:19c, 1 Kgs 16:13, 26; Isa 57:13).
בפסליהם בהלי נבר; cf. e.g., 1 Kgs 16:13, 26; Isa 57:13).

¹⁵⁹ So also Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 47.

¹⁶⁰ There are several reasons why גוי נבל designates an idolatrous nation, as opposed to simply a foolish nation. First, Moses initially calls the disobedient, idolatrous Israel a foolish nation (עם נבל, Deut 32:6; cf. 32:5!). Secondly, Isaiah *also* uses נבל to describe those who are blind and deaf in idolatry (Isa 32:3-4)—who furthermore, commit iniquity (און).

Moses also warns that if it were not for the taunt of other nations, YHWH would also make Israel אפס for her idolatry. Deuteronomy 32:26 begins, “I said, ‘אפאיהם,’ I will cease (אשביתה) their memory from humankind.” There is little consensus on this anomalous form in Deut 32:26;¹⁶¹ some,¹⁶² however, have offered a conjectural emendation of אפס הם.¹⁶³ Therefore, the original would read: אמרתי אפס הם אשביתה (I would say, “They are nothing,” I shall cease their memory from humankind). This reading would not only provide another example of אפס as being attributed to a person, but in light of the abundance of echoes of Deut 32-33, Isaiah could also be picking up this idea and using it to describe the idolaters of his day.

¹⁶¹ Several understand this form to derive from the root פאה and consider it a cognate with the Arabic root فاء (cut or cleave). The SP has an equally challenging אפי הם. The LXX (διασπερω) could come from the root פון (Carmel McCarthy, “Commentary on the Critical Apparatus,” *Deuteronomy* [BHQ; vol. 5; Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007], *147). The TO יחול רוגזי is similar to אפי לכלות (Ezek 20:8) or some connection of אפי and בלה. שיצי also seems related to בלה (e.g., Deut 7:22) or שמד (e.g., Deut 28:45). The Syr. as well as the Vg. understands this to be an interrogative (איפו הם). The modern translations are divided, though many side with the root פאה (ESV “cut,” NLT “annihilate,” Schlachter 2000 “Ich will sie wegblasen”), some with פון (NIV and CEV “scatter,” RVA “Echarialos”), and still others with איפו הם (Luther Bibel, “Wo sind sie?” Vg., “ubinam sunt”).

¹⁶² HALOT, DCH 6:644, and apparently NJPS. Patrick W. Skehan also translates the phrase “I would have said, I will make an end of them...” although he does not indicate his reconstructed original (“The Structure of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy (Deut 32:1-43)” *CBQ* 13 [1951]:153-63).

¹⁶³ If the original root were אפס, there are a few possibilities for the origin of present form. One could argue that the LXX translator misunderstood אפסיהם for אפציהם, confusing the ס and צ. Alternatively, the ס was lost through parablepsis, subsequently the א was added to form a verb. The צ could have arisen from the difficult root to conform it to a common word for exile. Once the form appeared as a verb, a yod may have been added to make אפס a suffix.

The internal evidence may also point in this direction. Consider Ps 9:7 [Eng. 9:6],

האויב תמו	The enemy is no more ,
חרבות לנצח	eternal ruins;
וערים נתשת	and [their] cities you remove,
אבד זכרם < >	their memory perishes (המה has been deleted following Syr.).

This may be the closest parallel to Deut 32:26 since nowhere does one find the co-occurrence of זכרם ... אשביתה. We have already seen the verb תמם used in a similar manner as אפס (Gen 47:15-16).

By way of summary, we have seen that Isaiah takes the theology and wording of Deuteronomy and uses them in his prophecy. The prophet reminds his hearers that YHWH alone is God; namely, there is no other rock to which they can flee, for nothing compares to YHWH. All other gods are nothing, and those who worship them become similarly inconsequential. Isaiah's use of Deut 32-33 demonstrates that he, likewise, considers those who worship no-gods to be nothing (אפס). Therefore, Isaiah's reference to the אפסי ארץ in Isa 45:22 refers to the do-nothing idol worshippers who must turn to YHWH.

6.5 Geographic Reference “Ends of the Earth”

No one doubts that YHWH's call in Isa 45:22 extends the *geographic* “ends” of the earth, which is a synecdoche for all humanity. Previously, we discerned a few interpretations of the exact identity of those addressed, as well as the nature of ישע. Scholars have seen the geographic “ends of the earth” as scattered Israel, all non-Israelites, or both. Interpreters have also understood the verb ישע as indicating either the recognition of legal vindication or deliverance from destruction. After reviewing the passage once more, we will conclude that the synecdoche includes both the nations and idolatrous Israel who are offered salvation from legal shame and actual destruction.

Isaiah first addresses the אפסי ארץ as פליטי הגוים, those who survived the onslaught of Cyrus' conquest who consist of both Israelites and non-Israelites. In both the trial speech of Isa 45:20-21 and the salvation oracle in 45:22-25, YHWH addresses the same individuals with these two phrases (אפסי ארץ and פליטי הגוים). Although Isaiah calls the remnant of Israel פליטים elsewhere (66:19), the term probably refers to the nations in

45:20 for two reasons. First, Isa 45:20 begins with a command to assemble (הקבצו) for a dispute. Several times within the context of other trial speeches, YHWH commands *the nations* to gather (קבץ) for a legal dispute (43:9, 44:11, 48:14). Furthermore, these individuals in 45:20 are described as stupid idolaters (לֹא יָדְעוּ הַנַּשְׂאִים אֶת־עֵץ פֶּסֶלִים). This does not necessarily rule out Israel as the one who is addressed for inasmuch as Israel acts like one of the nations by worshipping other gods, the covenant community is comparably foolish and shares the same fate. Therefore, we may conclude that the synecdoche (אֶפְסִי אֶרֶץ) speaks of all those who do not worship YHWH—regardless of the genetic heritage.

Isaiah argues that the only hope for condemned idolaters is found in turning to YHWH for deliverance from judgment and destruction. The prophet's own name declares that salvation is found in YHWH. Isaiah uses יָשַׁע to describe not only vindication, but also amnesty offered by the judge of the universe. Although some claim that יָשַׁע in Isa 45:22 merely depicts the acknowledgment of YHWH's victory in the dispute, it remains to be seen why Isaiah uses the phrase פָּנוּ אֵלַי in this context.¹⁶⁴ The language of *turning toward* usually has positive connotations (e.g., 2 Chr 4:4);¹⁶⁵ furthermore, as we will see momentarily, the expression may describe a change in religious affiliation. One would also expect a *Hiphil* of צָדַק to describe a declaration of legal victory, not the *Niphal* of יָשַׁע as the text reads. Therefore, יָשַׁע signifies more than simple acknowledgment of victory.

¹⁶⁴ Moreover, one ought not bifurcate אֵל and YHWH. Isaiah uses the singular אֵל to describe אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (45:15). Motyer also notes that the אֵל of 22 is contrasted with the helpless אֵל of 20d (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 66).

¹⁶⁵ A notable exception is Job 21:5 (פָּנוּ־אֵלַי וְהִשְׁמוּ וְשִׁימוּ יָד עַל־פִּיָּהּ, Turn to me and be appalled, and place a hand over [your] mouth). However, we will see a stronger case for “religious affiliation” below.

Instead of describing a mere confession, Isaiah uses the expression **פנה אל** and the verb **ישע** to call the **אפסי ארץ** to religious conversion. One finds the phrase **פנה אל** in Moses' admonitions against *turning* from YHWH *to* other gods (**פנה...מעם יהוה אלהינו**) (Moses' admonitions against *turning* from YHWH *to* other gods (**פנה...מעם יהוה אלהינו**), Deut 29:17). This phrase may be used to describe both religious unfaithfulness to YHWH (**פנה מ...**) and turning *to* other gods or idols (**פנה אל-אלהים**), Deut 31:18; cf. Deut 30:17, 31:20; **תפנו אל-האלילים**, Lev 19:4, 31; cf. Lev 20:6). The opposite of the phrase is to turn the back and not the face (**ויפנו אלי ערף ולא פנים**), Jer 32:33; Jer 2:27).¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Isaiah describes the sins of the people as turning to one's own way (**לדרכו פינו**), Isa 53:6, cf. 56:11). In light of these warnings, we may discern that the positive call in Isa 45:22 beckons the **אפסי ארץ** to affiliate with YHWH.

One last parallel in Deuteronomy, the phrase **פנה אל**, and the *Niphal* stem of the verb **ישע** may show that Isa 45:22 is one of the clearest calls for conversion, i.e., submission to YHWH as Suzerain. In Deut 33:29, Moses describes Israel as a people *saved by YHWH* (**עם נושע ביהוה**); furthermore, the very next phrase calls YHWH their *protecting Suzerain* (**מגן עזרך**, Deut 32:29). Additionally, other passages relate receiving salvation (**ישע** in the *Niphal*) with covenant obedience (Num 10:9, Jer 17:14, 33:16; cf. Isa 30:15). Just five verses prior to the passage under analysis (Isa 45:22), Isaiah also calls Israel "A people saved by YHWH" (**עם נושע ביהוה**, Isa 45:17), who are given eternal salvation (**תשועת עולמים**). Therefore, the collocation of **ישע** in the *Niphal* as well as the phrase **פנה אל** in Isa 45:22 is striking. YHWH calls all idolaters to turn from idolatry to

¹⁶⁶ Koole understands the combination of **אל** and **פנה** to describe a superior turning to an inferior. Thus, here the "Saviour God puts himself at the disposal of the world" (*Isaiah III*, 2:486). Yet this remains to be seen.

him, resulting in the submission to his hegemony in order to receive salvation.¹⁶⁷ Isaiah 45:22 may be one of the clearest calls to conversion in the Hebrew Bible. Evidence indicates that it is one of the most universal calls as well.

6.5.1 Universal Offer of Salvation in Isaiah

Within Isaiah, references to YHWH's universal reign abound, especially as a consequence of his vindication in his dispute with the idols.¹⁶⁸ The nations behold that YHWH alone is God through the testimony of his people, to the disgrace of those who make idols (45:15-16).

Every nation shall ultimately recognize YHWH's supremacy—all will bow to YHWH (45:23-25), willingly or reluctantly (25:3). Early in the prophecy, Isaiah declares that Egypt shall be judged for their idols and magicians, but afterwards the ancient nation shall be taught the way of YHWH (וְנוֹדַע יְהוָה לְמִצְרַיִם, 19:19-24). We have also seen that Israel is to be a light *to the nations*—giving sight to the blind (42:6-7; 45:18-19; 49:6). Israel's God will remove the blinders from all peoples and nations (25:7) in order that those previously sightless (i.e., idol worshippers) will receive vision and follow YHWH (42:16-17). When the Davidic king is in place, the nations shall seek his counsel and honor (11:10). Eventually, the nations and ends of the earth (אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ) shall see the salvation and vindication of YHWH, proclaiming “your God reigns” (מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, 52:7-10).¹⁶⁹ As the boundaries of the land expand, so YHWH's glory is further magnified

¹⁶⁷ Watts misses the point entirely when he understands Cyrus to be the one offering restoration of material benefits—for *in YHWH* is victory found (*Isaiah* 34-66, 707).

¹⁶⁸ Isa 2:2-4; 14:1-2; 18:7; 24:14-16; 41:20; 42:11-12, 16; 44:5; 45:14, 51:5 (cf 42:4!); 62:2.

¹⁶⁹ Isaiah 52:10b reads וְרָאוּ כָּל-אֶפְסֵי-אֶרֶץ אֶת יְשׁוּעַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ (And all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God). One may understand אֶת יְשׁוּעַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ as an expression that describes one who experiences salvation (cf. Exod 14:13; so also Koole, *Isaiah III*, 2: 486). Similarly, the idea of showing

(26:15).¹⁷⁰ YHWH's victory over the idols demonstrates that he is the true God, who alone can provide hope and help.

Thus, the geographic reference to אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ shows that YHWH calls all nations (i.e., idolaters) to submit to his reign and receive salvation.¹⁷¹ Moreover, Isaiah heightens the irony by using אֶפְסֵי as a pejorative name for the idol-like nothings. YHWH has proven the relative worthlessness of idolaters and beckons them to receive vindication and deliverance.

6.6 Summary

This thesis has argued that Isaiah consistently uses the term אֶפְסֵי to describe the exclusivity of YHWH and comparative nothingness of idols and idolaters; furthermore, since these two thoughts abound in the immediate context of Isa 45:22, the prophet uses this term to describe the “nothings” of the earth as well as the geographic “ends.”¹⁷² In

salvation (*hiphil* of רָאָה and יָשׁוּעַת) also implies causing one to experience salvation (Ps 91:16; 2 Chr 20:17). However, Ps 98:1-2 explicitly speaks against this—nations *see* deliverance, but do not enjoy it. Moreover, the previous verse in the passage (Isa 52:9) speaks of YHWH comforting his people and Jerusalem (עַמּוֹ...יְרוּשָׁלַם), which is subsequently contrasted with the nations and אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ who behold the salvation. If this passage spoke of the salvation of the אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ, one might also expect a third person pronoun with אֱלֹהִים instead of the first person that is found. In other words, Isaiah says that the ends of the earth will see *our* God's salvation. Therefore, Isa 52:10 describes the nations' perception—not the experience—of Israel's salvation.

As Labuschagne says, “[I]t is important to note the close connection between the idea of Yahweh's incomparability and the idea that not only Israel, but also the heathen had to acknowledge Yahweh as God” (*The Incomparability*, 146).

¹⁷⁰ Lest one over-interpret these universalistic promises, this promise is followed by a warning against those who continue to trust in false gods (42:17). Not all will bend the knee willingly.

¹⁷¹ Early Christians will pick up this message as they seek to proclaim the Gospel to the “ends of the earth” (ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς, Acts 1:8; cf. Isa 45:22 LXX, οἱ ἄν ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς).

¹⁷² One should not be surprised at the presence of paronomasia in Isaiah. The prophet uses numerous types of word play including another example of antanaclassis, i.e., the juxtaposition of a two homophones or homographs (Isa 50:16, 18; שָׁד “breast” vs. “oppression”; cf. נָפַשׁ in Jonah 2:8).

There have been several studies on the existence and use of word play in the Hebrew Bible and Isaiah (cf. the numerous articles and edited volumes in the bibliography below). We have also previously

this passage, the Creator calls the idolaters “nothing” once more and beckons them to turn to him—instead of the idols—for genuine help and hope. Indeed, the pericope continues by describing YHWH’s irrevocable legal decision (צדקה דבר ולא ישוב, 45:23): all will bend the knee and confess, “Only *in YHWH* is it said of me, ‘[He has] rightness and strength’” (אך ביהוה לי¹⁷³ <אמר צדקות ועז>). In other words, all will confess that the *only* (אך) source of help and hope is YHWH. Everyone acknowledges that YHWH *alone* brings vindication, yet only those who turn will experience salvation. For this reason, YHWH’s adversaries (נחרים, cf. 41:11) shall be ashamed (יבשו, 45:24), i.e., proven guilty and condemned.¹⁷⁴ Yet all of “Israel” shall be declared righteous and glorified (45:25).

noted how Isaiah, not unlike other prophets, uses terms as “nicknames,” in which one may expect to find *double entendres* or word play.

Several authors have sought to find significance or reasons for the inclusion of paronomasia in a work. Schorch describes three type of functions for puns: emphatic—“underlining” the text, exegetic—it “creates new semantic level,” and symbolic—it is “the symbol of a non-linguistic phenomenon” (“Between Science and Magic,” 207-220). If אפס is an “exegetic” pun, it would create “a second literary level, a new text, which competes with the main text” (ibid., 211). Other scholars describe wordplay in less specific terms. Some claim that it functions as a device used to surprise the reader or as Greenstein says, an instance of word play “if sufficiently striking, reacts an exegetical trajectory” (Greenstein, “Wordplay,” 970). This is exactly what happens in Isa 45:22—Isaiah strikes his hearers with a different use of אפס—not only is this another occurrence of the context specific “nothings,” but also the specific phrase “ends of the earth” as well.

While one must be cautious to avoid over-interpret and find wordplay where it does not exist, surely we have not uncovered every possible example of paronomasia in the Bible. Payne rightly warns, “It is imperative...that one is not led astray by the fact that two different English words might have to be employed to render a single Hebrew word in different contexts” (Payne, “Characteristic Word-Play in ‘Second Isaiah’: A Reappraisal” *JSS* 12 [1967]: 217). Based on our previous analysis of the term אפס, two different *Hebrew* nuances are intended. Moreover, Roberts’ comment is particularly helpful for reading the wordsmith Isaiah, “While one must remain aware of the danger of over-reading, however, it is far more likely that our lack of familiarity with the wider connotations of classical Hebrew words and phrases will result in underreading, of missing intentional double entendres” (“Double entendre in First Isaiah.” *CBQ* 54 [1992]: 40).

¹⁷³ So also 1QIsa^a.

¹⁷⁴ As Baltzer notes, כל is repeated four times in 22-24 (*Deutero-Isaiah*, 250). This would also draw these referents together.

Within this passage, we see that those who turn to YHWH receive the only available vindication and salvation—that of the exclusive Creator of all.

By way of summary, this chapter has argued that Isaiah uses **עַמִּים** in Isa 45:22 as a slur for idols and Israelite or non-Israelite idolaters as well as a synecdoche for all humanity. Isaiah develops his theology from the Torah and carries over much of the message of Deut 32-33 in particular. Gleaning from Deut 32-33, the prophet demonstrates YHWH's exclusivity and the idolaters' inconsequentiality. Isaiah may also echo Moses' designation of those who worship false gods as **עַמִּים**. In this way, Isaiah turns the phrase **עַמִּים** in 45:22 to call to salvation the spiritual "nothings" and geographical "ends" of the earth.

7. CONCLUSION:

This thesis has investigated Isaiah's use of the word אפס in Isa 45:22 and demonstrated that the phrase אפסי ארץ is a double entendre meaning "nothings" and "ends of the earth." After a brief inquiry into several preliminary issues, we analyzed the root אפס within its Semitic cognates as well as its usage in the Hebrew Bible. The word אפס predominately describes *cessation* or *lack of existence*. We have considered Isaiah's penchant for the term to describe idols and idolaters, especially in Isa 40-55. For this reason, Isaiah's use of אפס in Isa 45:22 ought to strike one as another example of Isaianic paronomasia.

Then we considered how Isa 45:22 fits within the form and structure of the book. We have noted the prophecy's general move from weal (Isa 1-39) to woe (40-66). We considered how the prophet contrasts two main literary forms (polemics and oracles of salvation) to demonstrate how idols are nothing (אפס) and how YHWH alone is God. Isaiah structured the juxtaposition of these two literary forms, through Isa 44:24-46:13 in part, to highlight the contrast of YHWH with the idols and their worshipers, identifying the latter as אפס.

Next, we analyzed Isaiah's major theme of the incomparability of YHWH. The prophet describes how the idols are neither transcendent, since they are created, nor existentially immanent, since they do nothing. YHWH, on the other hand, is completely unique and the sole Creator who helps, purposes, honors, and offers hope. Unlike the idols, YHWH intervenes in history and is worthy of trust. The prophet jeers at other gods, for they are nothing (אפס) and since people resemble what they worship, those who

worship the idols are similarly אפס. Thus, Isaiah ridicules the folly of trusting in anything else but the exclusive Creator of the universe.

Finally, this thesis interpreted Isa 45:22 in light of our previous investigation. We considered the occasions where Isaiah calls the idols and their worshippers אפס and concluded that the prophet uses this term to taunt the idolaters. By comparing Isaiah and Deut 32-33, we noted the abundance of striking, parallel themes, including the exclusivity of YHWH as well as the comparative nothingness of every other god or nation. Additionally, Moses also appears to call those who worship false gods אפס. We concluded that אפסי ארץ in Isa 45:22 likewise refers to the nothings-like idolaters. Nevertheless, Isaiah also uses the standardized phrase אפסי ארץ to designate the “ends of the earth,” and while there is some disagreement about the exact understanding of this expression, this thesis has argued that אפסי ארץ is a synecdoche for all humanity. We concluded that YHWH’s call for repentance in Isa 45:22, which is directed toward the אפסי ארץ, addresses *both the “ends” and the “nothings” of the earth*. Therefore, Isa 45:22 stands as one of the most evangelistic passages of the Hebrew Bible—all are beckoned to find salvation in YHWH.

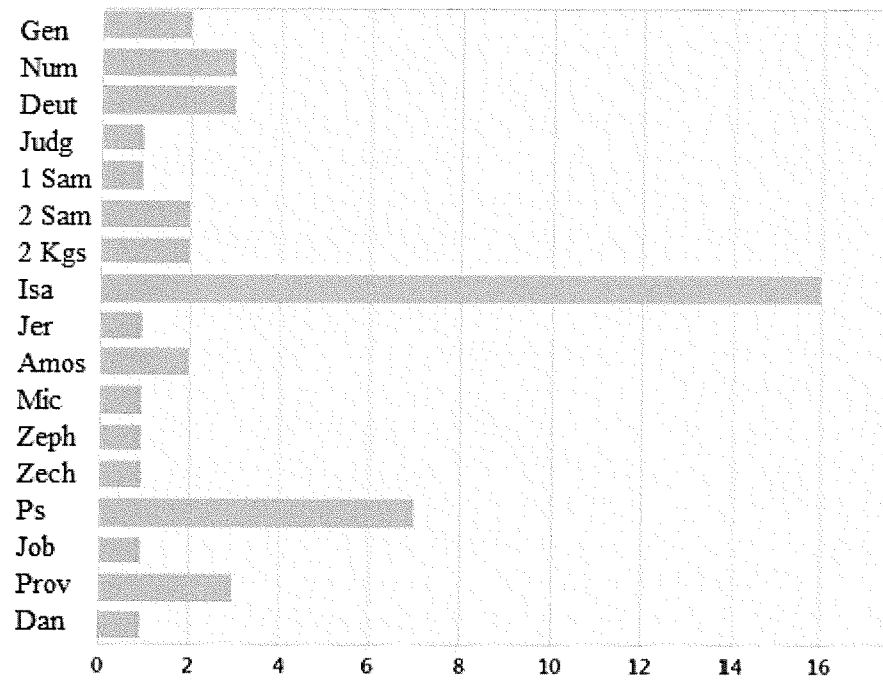
Isaiah proclaims his message clearly: YHWH alone is the Lord of the universe—compared to him, all else is nothing. The only source of help and hope for every idol-like “nothing” is the transcendent *and* immanent Creator. To him every person should turn for salvation; for he alone is God, and there is no other.

APPENDIX A: NUANCES OF אַפֶּס:

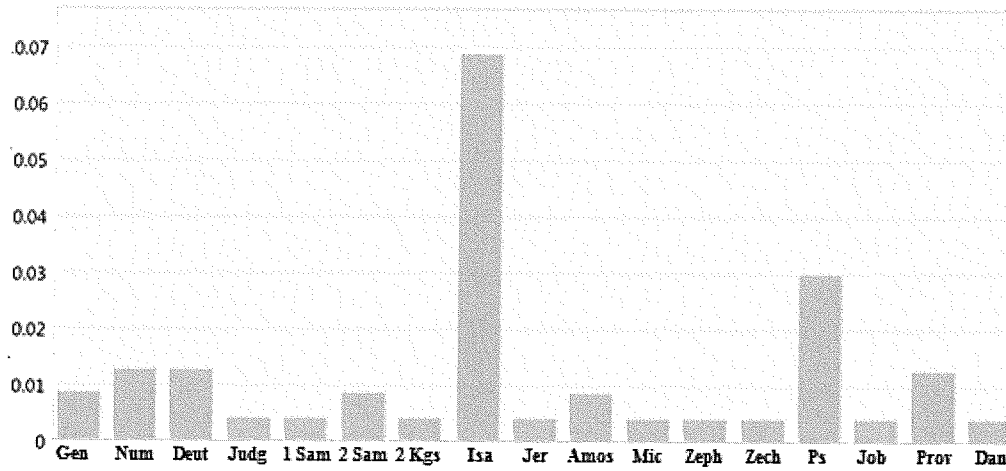
	אַפֶּס (verb- to be no more)	אַפֶּס ≈ אֵין Nonexistence	אַפֶּס (כִּי) Limitative	אַפֶּס עַד Singularity	אַפֶּסִי אֶרֶץ “Ends of the earth”	Total
Isaiah	2	10	0	2	2	16
Remaining HB	3	8	7	2	12 ^A	32
Total	5	19	7	3	14	48

^A Six of the 12 are in the book of Psalms.

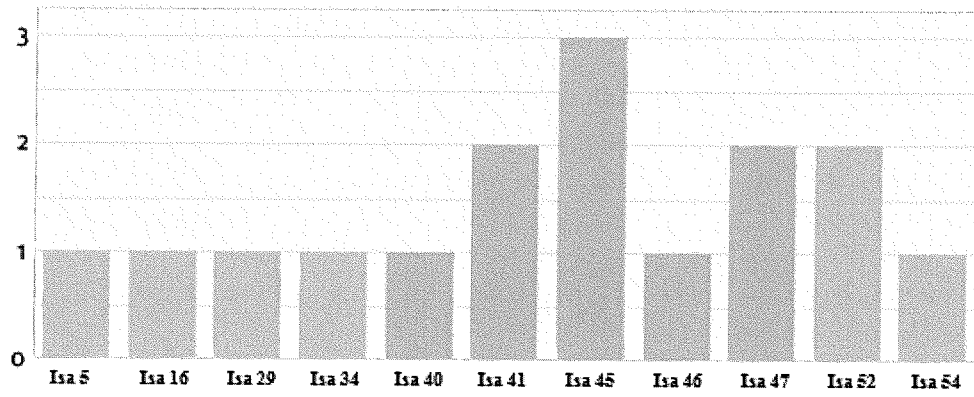
APPENDIX B: DISTRIBUTION OF THE ROOT **נפח** IN THE HEBREW BIBLE #1:



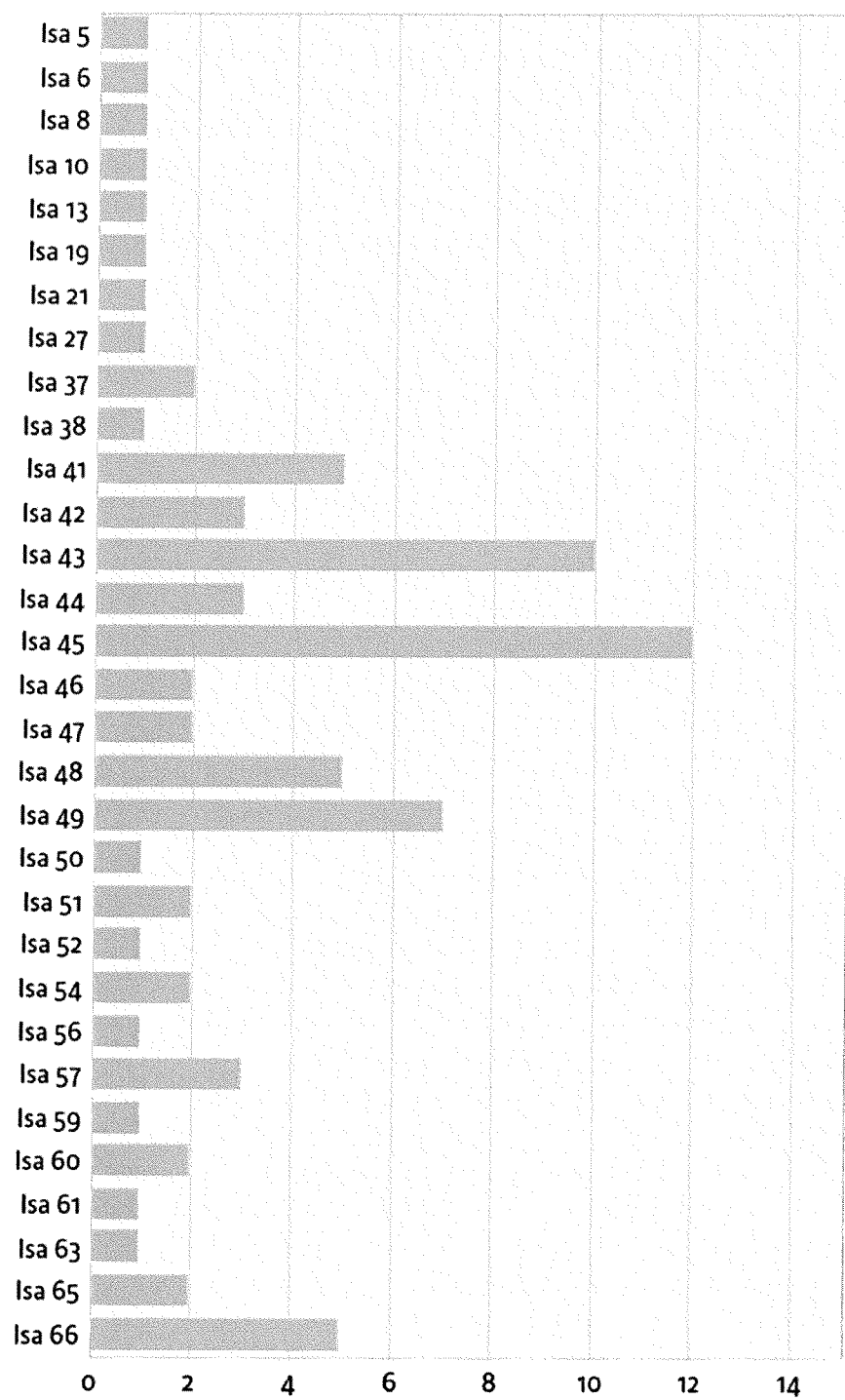
APPENDIX C: DISTRIBUTION OF THE ROOT **כנס** IN THE HEBREW BIBLE #2
 NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES PER NUMBER OF VERSES



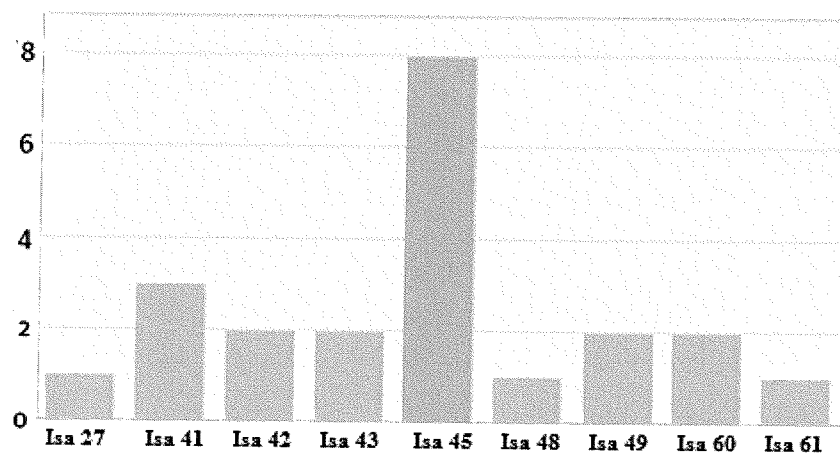
APPENDIX D: DISTRIBUTION OF עַפֹּס IN ISAIAH



APPENDIX E: DISTRIBUTION OF PRONOUN אנכי/אני IN ISAIAH



APPENDIX F: DISTRIBUTION OF אני יהוה IN ISAIAH



APPENDIX G: קצה הארץ IN TRANSLATION

	Isa 5:26	(26:15) ^B	Isa 40:28	41:5	41:9	42:10	43:6	48:20	49:6	62:11
MT	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ	קצה הארץ
LXX	ἀρκου γῆς	τοῖς ἐνδόξοις γῆς	τὰ ἄκρα τῆς γῆς	ἀρκου γῆς	ἀρκου γῆς	ἀρκου γῆς	ἀρκου γῆς	ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς	ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς	ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς
TJ	סיפי ארעא	רשׂיעיא לזיהנם	יסודי ארעא	דבסיפי ארעא	זרעית ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא
Peshitta	ܣܦܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܣܦܝܐ ܠܙܝܗܢܡ	ܝܣܘܕܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܕܒܣܝܦܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܙܪܥܝܬܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܣܝܦܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܣܝܦܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܣܝܦܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܣܝܦܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ	ܣܝܦܝܐ ܐܪܥܐ

^B קצוֹי־אֶרֶץ

^C ܣܦܝܐ is only used as a translation of קצה in Isaiah.

APPENDIX H: אפסי ארץ IN TRANSLATION

	Deut 33:17	1 Sam 2:10	Isa 45:22	Isa 52:10	Jer 16:9	Mic 5:3	Zech 9:10	Ps 2:8	Ps 22:28	Ps 59:14	Ps 67:8	Ps 72:8	Ps 98:3	Prov 30:4
MT	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי-ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- הארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי-ארץ	אפסי- ארץ	אפסי- ארץ
LXX	ἄκρου γῆς	ἄκρα γῆς	ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς	τὰ ἄκρα τῆς γῆς	ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς	ἄκρων τῆς γῆς	διεσβελας γῆς	τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς	τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς	τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς	τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς	περάτων τῆς οἰκουμένης	τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς	τῶν ἄκρων τῆς γῆς
TJ (TO)	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	סיפי ארעא	בריתא בארעא
Syr.	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא	חבונס גאולא

APPENDIX I: SYNOPSIS OF JESHURUN PASSAGES IN DEUTERONOMY AND ISAIAH

Isa 44:2, 6, 8	Deut 32:15-17	Deut 33:5	Deut 33:26
<p>כה־אמר יהוה</p> <p>עשך יצרך מבטן יעורך אל־תירא עבדי יעקב</p> <p>ישראל בחרתי בך:</p> <p>... כה־אמר יהוה מלך־ ישראל וגאלי יהוה</p> <p>צבאות אני ראשון ואני אחרון ומבלעדי אין אלהים:</p> <p>... אל־תפחדו ואל־תרתו הלא מאז השמעתי</p> <p>והגדתי ואתם עדי</p> <p>היש אלוה מבלעדי ואין צור בל־ידעתי:</p>	<p>ישמן ישרון ויבעט שמנת עבית בשית ויטש אלוה עשדו וינבל צור ישערו יִקְנֹאוּ בָּזִים בְּחוֹעֶבֶת יִכְעִסוּהוּ:</p> <p>יזבחו לשדים לא אלה אלהים לא ידעום</p> <p>And <i>Jeshurun</i> grew fat and kicked. You grew fat, think, you were obstinate and he forsook God his maker and scorned the <u>rock</u> of his salvation And they angered him by their <u>foreign things</u> with their <u>abominations</u> they vexed him.</p> <p>They sacrificed to demons, a no-god...</p>	<p>יהי בִּישְׁרוֹן</p> <p>בהתאסף ראשי עם יחד שבטי ישראל:</p> <p>מלך king When the heads of the people were gathered, together the tribes of Israel</p>	<p>אין כאל ישרון רכב שמים</p> <p>ועזרך ובנאותו שחקים:</p> <p>There is none like God, <i>Jeshurun</i> who rides the heavens</p> <p>to help you and in his majesty, the heavens</p>

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